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Understanding Consumers' Responses to Spiritual Advertising

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Understanding Consumers' Responses to Spiritual Advertising

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Dedication

To my amazing husband, Eyal; may we always spread light together

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Understanding Consumers' Responses to Spiritual Advertising

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This dissertation sets out to advance the field of spirituality and advertising. It first discusses --the Spirituality in Advertising Framework (SAF) -- used as a platform for research of spirituality and advertising. Next, it explains how the SAF is used to study the spiritual message in advertising. These previous advancements have led to the main study of the current dissertation, which focuses on consumers and their reactions to spiritually-dense commercials (which are television ads rife with spiritual themes). Twenty nine semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted with students from three different types of student organizations (New Age, religious and Sports), at the University of Texas at Austin. Three main areas of findings were suggested: the presence of spiritual themes in the commercials, the personal meaning participants derive from the commercials and some relevant advertising/branding issues. It was found that participants not only captured the SAF spiritual ideas, but also offered some new themes, including

hope, embracing life, destiny vs. free will and the concept of a Higher Power. Moreover, it was revealed that the use of nature, a strong human factor and inspiring ideas in the commercials elicited the most meaningful reactions from participants. The final set of findings, which focused on advertising and branding issues, revealed the following points: 1) authenticity is a major construct in the field of spiritual advertising; 2) more so than the other groups, the New Age group tends towards predispositional skepticism of advertising; 3) the spiritual message created a boomerang effect under certain conditions; 4) the spiritual message triggered questions about brand identity and personal identity of the consumers; and 5) only certain product categories mesh with a spiritual message. Finally, the dissertation ends with implications for practice that could potentially change the face of the advertising industry.

Table of Contents

List of Tables	xii
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Chapter 2: The Spiritually-Inclined Consumer and the Emerging Spiritual Need ..5	
Contextualizing the Spiritual Need	6
The Decline of Traditional Religion	6
The Erosion of Traditional Community	13
Chapter 3: The Field of Spiritual Advertising	17
Building Theoretical Bridges	17
Review of Past Literature	20
Chapter 4: The Spirituality in Advertising Framework	25
Application of the SAF to Study The Spiritual Message	30
Previous Research of the Spiritual Message	30
The Nature and Interpretation of the SAF in Televised Advertising ...	32
Chapter 5: Methods	36
Study Rationale	36
Goals and Research Questions	37
A Qualitative Approach to Study Advertising	37
Method: In-Depth Interviews	39
A General Overview of the Current Study	40
Television Ads' Sampling	41
Participants	43
Participants' Sampling	43
Sources of Participants and Recruitment Procedures	44
Characteristics and Presentation of the Participants	46
Participant Socio-Demographic Characteristics	47
Ranking Spiritual Belief Statements	48

Presentation of the Participants.....	49
Research Protocol	52
Confidentiality	55
Privacy and Confidentiality of Participants	55
Confidentiality of the Research Data	55
Data Analysis	56
Quality Control	59
Chapter 6: Interpretation of Data	61
First Section: “Seeing” Spiritual Themes in Commercials.....	62
Supporting Existing SAF Ideas.....	63
Emerging Additional SAF Ideas	69
The Use of Spiritual Terminology	73
Explaining Spirituality in Specific Commercials	76
Second Section: Making Personal Meaning of Spiritually-Dense Commercials	84
The Human Factor	84
The Outdoor Setting.....	87
The Experiences Presented in the Ads.....	88
Life Junction	90
Inspiring Ideas and Messages	90
Third Section: Branding and Advertising Issues Raised by Participants	92
Attitudes towards Advertising and Branding.....	92
Skepticism towards Advertising	92
Authenticity.....	94
The Influence of Spiritual Advertising	97
The Cognitive Level	97
The Emotional Level.....	101
The Behavioral Level.....	103
Self and Identity in Relation to the Brand	104
Product Category	107

Chapter 7: Discussion and Future Research	111
“Seeing” Spiritual Themes in Commercials	111
Future Research Direction Related to the SAF Framework	114
Making Personal Meaning of Spiritually-Dense Commercials	116
The Human Factor	116
The Outdoor Setting.....	120
The Experiences Presented in the Ads.....	120
Inspiring Ideas and Messages	122
Future Research Direction Related to the Meaning of Spiritually-Dense Commercials	123
Branding and Advertising Issues Raised by Participants	124
Attitudes towards Advertising and Branding.....	124
Skepticism towards Advertising	124
Authenticity.....	127
The Influence of Spiritual Advertising	128
The Cognitive Level	128
The Emotional Level.....	131
The Behavioral Level.....	132
Self and Identity in Relation to the Brand	134
Product Category	137
Future Research Direction Related to Advertising and Branding Issues in the Context of Spirituality	138
Chapter 8: Managerial Implications and Conclusions	141
Advertising Practitioners and the Spiritual Message	141
Managerial and Branding Implications.....	144
Social and Educational Implications.....	148
Summary and Conclusion	149

Appendix A: Interview Protocol.....	154
Appendix B: Questionnaire.....	156
Appendix C: Debriefing.....	159
Appendix D: Recruitment Face to Face Conversation with Contact Person	160
Appendix E: Recruiting Ad	161
Appendix F: Gift Card Receipt.....	162
Appendix G: Consent Form.....	163
Appendix H: Contact Summary Sheet.....	166
References.....	168

List of Tables

Table 4.1: A summary of the SAF	29
Table 5.1: Demographic characteristics of study participants.	47
Table 5.2: Frequencies of the Spiritual Belief Statements.....	49
Table 5.3: Participant Profile	51

Chapter 1: Introduction

A recent article in Advertising Age declares:” "Megatrends 2010" and a host of other best-selling business books argue persuasively that spirituality is going to be the defining trend of the 21st century” (Turak 2010). This is hardly surprising considering the increased interest in spiritual values among consumers (Couchman 2005; Drumheller 2005; Kale 2004; Rickard 1994; Roof 1993; Smith 2003; Tinic 1997; Werder and Roberts 2005). A 2009-10 Yankelovich MONITOR report demonstrates how religion and spirituality play an integral rule in consumers’ everyday lives (Dolliver 2010).

As a result, marketing and advertising practitioners have begun to pay attention to the phenomenon and already incorporated some spiritual messages in commercials (for example, Louis Vuitton depicts life as a never-ending journey, while J.C. Penney promotes the idea of appreciation). Furthermore, practitioners and theoreticians understand today that when consumers buy intangible products, they are actually buying meaning and intangible qualities (McCracken 1986). For example, buying a financial service could mean freedom and change of life to a particular consumer. Moreover, with the rise of traditions such as the Feng shui and the recent revelation of neuroscience research of a third neural system in our brain (see the Spiritual Quotient (SQ) concept in Zohar and Marshall 2001), there is more room for possible connections between the world of advertising/consumerism and spirituality. This new approach potentially could change the way we think about consumerism and the process of consumption.

Accordingly, the study of spirituality in advertising should be a priority on the agenda for researchers.

Practitioners predict the increased use of spirituality in future advertising and the need to cater for spiritually-inclined consumers (Rickard 1994; Smith 2003). Therefore, they discuss the much needed shift in marketing thinking: “selfless marketing means forgetting about the bottom line, our products, and personal ambitions, by fanatically serving our customer's needs” (Turak 2010). “Advertising Age” continues: “today we are on the threshold of another quantum leap: a quantum leap that creative marketers will make by linking products and brands to a transformation of being” (Turak 2010).

Although some studies explored the connection between spirituality or religion and advertising/consumption (e.g. Belk and colleagues 1989; Einstein 2007; Haley, White and Cunningham 1999; McKee 2000; Moore 1994; Pardun 2000), there is still a tremendous lack in research that links between spirituality and consumers and advertising messages. Moreover, past research mostly adopted definitions of spirituality that are less practical, center on religion and thus less suitable for the study of advertising. This dissertation focuses on a theoretical framework which is tailored for the study of spirituality in advertising and emphasizes elements that are broader than religion, including the concepts of meaning, human potential, suffering and day-to-day life experiences (see Marmor-Lavie, Stout and Lee 2009).

This dissertation embarked upon a mission to advance the field of spirituality and advertising, by developing a theoretical framework and applying it to empirical research. The following structure will be presented in the dissertation:

A thorough review of the literature on the spiritually-inclined consumer and the emerging spiritual need is presented in chapter 2.

Chapter 3 describes the exploration of potential theoretical bridges between the constructs of spirituality and advertising. Moreover, an effort is made to learn about previous research in the field of spiritual advertising.

Chapter 4 focuses on the Spirituality in Advertising Framework (SAF), which represents the theoretical roots of the main study of the dissertation. Additionally, an application of the SAF to the spiritual message in advertising is discussed.

The aforementioned roadmap leads to the main study of the dissertation which focuses on the consumer and his/her relationship with the spiritual message in advertising. Chapter 5 reveals the qualitative methods used in this exploration, while elaborating on the study's goals, participants, sampling procedures, research protocol and data analysis. Two sub-goals were defined for this study: 1) justification with individuals the appearance of spiritual themes in ads, and 2) understanding the meaning people derive from spiritually-dense commercials on two different levels: a) a personal level and b) a brand/advertising level.

Chapter 6 presents the interpretation of the data which is organized according to the three main Research Questions of the study. In other words, the chapter is comprised of three main parts: participants' interpretation of the spiritual ads, the personal meanings participants derive from the spiritual ads and some branding/advertising issues raised by participants.

Chapter 7 discusses the study's findings while providing some theoretical anchors and suggestions for further research.

Finally, chapter 8 offers some implications for practice and closes with a brief summary and conclusion section.

Chapter 2: The Spiritually-Inclined Consumer and the Emerging Spiritual Need

The growing belief in spiritualism – from 12% in 1976 to 52% in 1998 – has been tracked by the Yankelovich MONITOR (Smith 2003, p. 52). Studies show that young people express values such as preservation of the environment, rain forests and other issues of globalization (Tinic 1997). According to Brandweek, books, movies and music point at one direction: "Americans are mainstreaming spirituality." (Stark 1998, p.25) According to the magazine - American Demographics: "the suddenness and scope of this change is a signal that a massive shift in cultural values and personal behavior is taking place." (Wolfe 1998, p.16) A research published in Australia by Grey Worldwide reinforces the same inclinations: Australians are looking in life for something deeper, meaningful and spiritual. Real living for Australians means living with wellbeing, indulging the soul, being close to nature, reducing stress and connecting with family and community (Plaskitt 2004). Mary Winter (Grey Worldwide Melbourne head of planning) correlates between these inclinations and the worlds of consumerism and marketing: "what people are looking for is products that are authentic, real and true, possibly hand-made or so they can tell the origin." (Plaskitt 2004, p.4) Many of these stated values resonate with the characteristics of spiritual people that will be presented later, such as 'seeing the big picture' or 'unity of all mankind' which emphasize the idea that we belong to a larger whole (as in the case of environmental and global values) or with the notion of 'naturalized spirituality,' encompassing the separation of religion and spirituality. These

tendencies have also been tracked by the trade press (see Goldman 1998; Rickard 1994; Smith 2003).

"Advertising [nowadays] is taking the language of nontraditional spiritual, pseudospiritual, and psychospiritual movements - -the jargon of soul, self-help, and recovery - - much more seriously." (Poniewozik 1998, p.40) For example, RJR Nabisco launched a campaign that basically presented noshes as soul food. The marketers, in the campaign, "enjoin snackers not to "fill yourself" but to "fulfill yourself." (Poniewozik 1998, p.40)

In an attempt to better understand the emergence of the spiritually-inclined consumer, two major related phenomena providing contextual explanations are explored: (1) the decline of traditional religion and (2) the erosion of traditional community and the rise of individualism.

CONTEXTUALIZING THE SPIRITUAL NEED

The Decline of Traditional Religion

While the concept of spiritual needs certainly is not new, how can the notion of "spiritual but not religious" be explained? Three trends can help us better understand the theoretical roots and origins of the growing spiritual need in the American society and the growth of spiritual seekers.

First, many suggest that the decline of institutionalized religion has created a void which has been filled by non-institutional and non-traditional forms of spirituality (Robertson 1971). Religious practice in its traditional institutionalized form has

experienced significant decline (Couchman 2005). Traditional institutions in this work means all institutions related to the tradition-oriented religiousness (TR) defined by Saucier and Skrzypinska (2006). George Barna, a well-known pollster and an evangelical pastor by himself, identified a decline of Americans who view religion as important in people's lives: in 1986, 56% of Americans viewed religion as "very important" while only 53% of Americans suggested that in 1989 (Barna 1990). Moreover, another poll from 2003 showed that: "two out of three adults (66%) contend that religion is losing its influence in American society" (see the Barna Group website at: <http://www.barna.org/FlexPage.aspx?Page=BarnaUpdate&BarnaUpdateID=133>).

Moreover, the 2008 new American Religious Identification Survey (ARIS) finds that religious groups in the USA have lost ground, and more people turn to spiritual frontiers (Grossman 2009). The survey reports that: "the percentage of people who call themselves in some way Christian has dropped more than 11% in a generation." (Grossman 2009, see the online source: http://www.usatoday.com/news/religion/2009-03-09-american-religion-ARIS_N.htm).

Fuller (2001) names a few developments which have contributed to the mistrust in institutions among the more educated, including the increased prestige of sciences, modern biblical scholarship and cultural relativism. Religious scholars who study religious change have identified a new religious practice, "spiritual seeking" (Wuthnow 2001; Roof 1999). These people who tend to see themselves as "spiritual but not religious" are roughly about 20% of the population (Marler and Hadaway 2002). "These individuals are not church-going, are more likely to be agnostic, and 'independent from

others'." They tend to experiment with New Age or Eastern practices." (Marler and Hadaway 2002, p.297). People no longer confine their search for spirituality within the limits of traditional religion, but seek spirituality as a substitute for institutionalized religion, seeking the sacred in non-traditional places such as work, family, school, hospitals and nature (Roof 1993). The spillover of spirituality into other realms of our lives is demonstrated herein below, by examining two areas where research has been done: 1) the organization and work, and 2) health.

The Organization and Work: evidence for the spiritual mindset is found in research on Corporate Societal Marketing (CSM), the phenomenon which describes a strategic decision by a company to market and advertise with a social dimension. A company could identify with various social causes, such as fighting domestic violence or raising awareness of breast cancer, for example. Marketing with a social dimension is also called cause-related marketing, cause marketing, passion branding and the like (Drumwright 1996). Drumwright (1996) found that campaigns with a social dimension are highly effective in achieving later goals. Interviews with informants from corporations using a social-dimension in their management revealed that although traditional economic goals were not affected by cause-related marketing, goals such as employers' motivation and communicating the company's mission were significantly extremely affected.

Others have examined 'organization identification', which refers to the overlap of a person's self-perception with his or her perceptions about the organization (Lichtenstein, Drumwright and Braig 2004, p. 17). Lichtenstein, et al. (2004) examined

the level of identification between customers and organizations that support nonprofits. Findings suggest that identification with organizations that support nonprofits can result in increased support toward the company, increased purchased behavior and increased donations to the nonprofit organization the company supports.

Finally, Berger, Cunningham and Drumwright (2006), identify a new concept – social alliance. "A social alliance is a partnership between a company and a nonprofit that has moved beyond cause-related marketing and philanthropy to encompass a close, mutually beneficial, long-term partnership that is designed to accomplish strategic goals for both partners." (Berger et al. 2006, p.129) They examined the effect of this higher level of CSM on employees, finding that "social alliances can be important means whereby employees identify more closely with their organizations while gaining greater senses of being whole, integrated persons." (Berger et al. 2006, p.135) Furthermore, the levels of connection to the organization have risen and "allow people to see themselves in a more holistic fashion and as part of a larger community." (Ibid, p.135)

Work satisfaction of employees also seems to benefit when the spiritual dimension is addressed. Research reports that one of the major determinants of job satisfaction is attainment of spiritual needs (Mitroff and Denton 1999). Studies have shown that spirituality at the workplace increases productivity, creativity, loyalty and team work as well (Duchon and Ashmos 2005; Elm 2003; Mitroff and Denton 1999; Richards et al. 2006). Practitioners in the work environment have already responded to these needs by establishing "more than 10,000 prayer groups active within corporate workplaces" (Smith 2003). Additionally, Johnson (2007) found that spiritual needs are

met through ordinary activities at the workplace; the relationships formed at work can sometimes manifest more spirituality than traditional spiritual rituals. A Recent ethnographic work conducted in Mexico on multi-level marketing in the developing world has demonstrated how person-to-person marketing successfully combines individual interests and spirituality (Cahn 2006). This study suggests that direct sellers are far more satisfied with the spiritual part of their work where they help people through spiritual messaging (i.e., the power of positive thinking, taking responsibility and overcoming barriers). Ultimately, the spiritual aspect of the job, rather than the functional aspect, is what motivates the sellers.

"Holistic", "integrated persons" or "being whole" – these terms were used by employees to describe satisfaction from the spiritual actions conducted by the companies described above. These terms are all expression of spiritual core ideas such as: 'letting go', 'integration with others' or 'self-actualization' (these core ideas will be described later in the text). These studies illustrate the breadth of spiritual need and fulfillment among humans – as consumers as well as employees. When companies act accordingly and add a spiritual-social dimension to the companies' life, it is actually manifesting the spiritual core idea of 'seeing the big picture.' Viewing the big picture of society, the organization, and the employees can result in both economic and non-economic benefits. The literature reports on benefits that can result by taking such an approach (e.g., enhanced reputation, customer loyalty and increased purchased behavior (Berger et al. 2006)) but has not labeled this approach as “spiritual” per se.

Health: in the health discipline, spirituality has been an important consideration for years. Health practitioners as well as academics have witnessed and recognized the role of spirituality in patients' recovery. Spirituality has been found to play a major role in coping with illness and distress (Eggers 2003; Koenig, George and Titus 2004; Mytko and Knight 1999; Underwood and Teresi 2002). These findings echo national polls that have shown the following: 63% of Americans reported that physicians should talk to patients about spiritual issues, 79% believe that faith can facilitate recovery from an illness and 56% reported that faith actually did help them recover (McNichol 1996). Spirituality in the health arena tends to be assessed quantitatively through scales, such as the Daily Spiritual Experience Scale (DSES) (Underwood and Teresi 2002) which focuses on the practical side of the spiritual daily experiences. This scale goes beyond any faith, religion or belief and emphasizes the common spiritual processes regular human beings experience. Several self-rated scales on spirituality (e.g., Self-rated spirituality (SRS), Self-Categorizations of Spirituality and Observer-rated spirituality (ORS) (Koenig, George and Titus 2004)) allow respondents to rate themselves on how spiritual or how religious they are, while health professionals rate the respondents as well. Several scales have measured spirituality in relation to coping with cancer (Mytko and Knight 1999). Theoretical and measurement advances in the study of spirituality in health may provide a useful template for research undertaken in other domains.

A second trend contributing to the emergence of the spiritual need is associated with the eclectic nature of the spiritually-inclined consumer. Spiritual seekers tend toward eclecticism (Abzug 2007) and are willing to borrow from different spiritual traditions,

while not remaining loyal to a certain one (Wuthnow 2001). The following quotation is a good exemplar:

Americans are approaching spirituality like a Chinese dinner menu: a pinch of organized religion from column A; some alternative beliefs (New Age, Eastern, Native American) from column B; a dash of body and mind consciousness to connect the physical world to the spiritual realm through yoga, meditation and healing practices from Column C. (Stark 1998, p.25)

This is hardly surprising considering the energetic and pluralistic nature of American culture. Schmidt (2005) locates these American qualities in 19th century America where spirituality already appeared in the forms of meditation, mysticism, solitude and creative citizenship. Couchman (2005, p.51) refers to this quality as a "'pick and mix' attitude toward spirituality." He explains that today we define ourselves through the choices we make and thus the same mixture of choices is implemented in our choosing of spirituality. "Spirituality has become a means of picking and choosing those elements from which individuals receive the greatest gratification." (Drumheller 2005, p.50).

Lastly, some researchers are inclined to link individuals' generation or age as a characteristic of their identity as "spiritual seekers", most notably identifying baby boomers as spiritual seekers (Flory 2000; Wolfe 1998). Baby boomers are said to be "aging into the life stage where people focus less on material things and more on non-material satisfactions like family, community, and spirituality" (Smith 2003, p. 52). Wolfe (1998) also correlates between spiritual values and age and suggests that studying the core values, common among adults (that is surveying adults around the adult median age), will reveal the leading values of our society, including spirituality. A New Zealand

tourism ad targets this specific "adult" audience and plays on the needs mostly expressed by this age group (i.e. desire for personal development, environmental legacy, simplicity and authenticity) (Marketing 2004, p.52).

Marler and Hadaway (2002) combine data from various national surveys and reveal evidence showing a correlation between age and "spiritual but not religious" dispositions; the results indicate that the younger the generation the more people in it tend to see themselves as "spiritual but not religious". Others disagree with this proposition that increased spirituality is age or generation related. For example, generation Xers have been identified as possessing qualities which reflect the definition of spirituality. "They... are even more alienated from religious institutions than their parents...Gen Xers differentiate between being spiritual, seen as more internal and private, and being religious, which is seen as more external, exclusive, and doctrinal." (Drumheller 2005, p.50) Moreover, Schmidt (2005), in *Restless Souls*, demonstrates through the stories of America's greatest spiritual seekers, such as Ralph Waldo Emerson, Margaret Fuller, Thomas Higginson, Sarah J. Farmer and Thomas R. Kelly, how the origins and sources of this "new age thought" go back into 19th century America and not necessarily limited to a certain generation.

The Erosion of Traditional Community

A second phenomenon in the emergence of the spiritually-inclined consumer is the erosion of the traditional community and the rise of individualism. The loss of traditional community has long been attributed to the rise of individualism, modernity,

technology, consumer culture and the development of mass media (e.g., Durkheim 1933). Many contemporary consumer researchers believe that community is such an essential construct in our social thought that it will not fade away, but rather will reappear in a different form, suitable to today's post-modern world (Muniz and O'Guinn 2001).

Muniz and O'Guinn's concept of brand community is one interpretation of the reappearance of community in a different form. They define brand community as:

... a specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relationships among admirers of a brand. It is specialized because at its center is a branded good or service. Like other communities, it is marked by a shared consciousness, rituals and traditions, and a sense of moral responsibility" (Muniz and O'Guinn 2001, p.412)

The four characteristics they associate with a brand community (i.e., shared consciousness, shared rituals/traditions, moral responsibility (which is an obligation to the community as a whole) and lack of geographical restrictions) resonate with several characteristics of spiritual people and values. The ideas of 'unity of all mankind' and 'integration with others' (will be further discussed later) that present the world as one unity which manifests through shared objectives, responsibilities and caring toward other human beings is similar to the brand community concepts of moral community and shared consciousness. Moreover, in spirituality as well as in brand community, the discourse about ritualism is pivotal. Finally, the non-geographical element of the brand community meshes with the essence of spirituality. Once restricted to geographical place, with the advancement of technology (particularly mass media), the relevancy of physical and/or geographical location has vanished. In the era of the Internet, which facilitates

communication unrestricted to either time or place, communities can occur virtually, connecting individuals with one another for any purpose or shared interest.

The concept of community (Anderson 1983; Muniz and O'Guinn 2001) includes the notion of 'imagined community' where members imagine other members they have never seen. This notion interfaces well with the 'anything is possible' idea of spiritual people that will be discussed later, where the physical world or geography should not deter us from accomplishing or achieving anything. Spiritual people encourage imagination through self-fulfilling prophecy as a tool to attain self-actualization (see the idea of 'self-actualization' appears in a later section), including communication with others.

According to Muniz and O'Guinn (2001), community becomes “a common understanding of shared identity” (p. 413) and is practiced through material consumption. They argue that one of the major manifestations of the new form of community comes from the world of consumer culture due to the central role it plays in the modern world:

The emerging consumer culture was one in which branded goods replaced unmarked commodities, where mass advertising replaced personal selling, and where the individual consumer replaced the communal citizen. The growing centrality of the individual consumer and his or her growing materialistic desires were (and are) said to be part and parcel of the loss of community. (Muniz and O'Guinn 2001, p.413)

Accordingly, the spiritually-inclined consumer could find a home in a potential spiritual brand community which emphasizes a spiritual message. Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) conclude that brand communities are social entities, where consumers create their meaning in conjunction with marketers and both groups operate in these communities out

of truthful obligations and consciousness. To the extent that the spiritually-inclined consumer, as well as other consumers living in the post-industrialized world, searches for communities to belong to, it is natural that they will try to satisfy these needs by turning to various communities. Why not then a spiritual brand community which is one of the manifestations of communities in the modern era?

After contextualizing and grounding the spiritual need with the emergence of the spiritually inclined consumer, chapter 3 examines past research in the field of spiritual advertising, while presenting some theoretical connections between the constructs of spirituality and advertising.

Chapter 3: The Field of Spiritual Advertising

The following chapter will first elaborate on the theoretical connections between spirituality and advertising, and then expand on previous research in the field of spirituality and advertising/marketing.

BUILDING THEORETICAL BRIDGES

Media scholars have acknowledged in the past how advertising messages reflect patterns and trends in our society (Holbrook 1987; Maguire and Weatherby 1998). Spirituality is no exception; despite the basic contradictions between the world of the spiritual and the world of the commercial, we do witness how the growing interest in spirituality emerges in everyday commercials.

Researchers suggest that both spirituality and advertising revolve around the notion of meaning and thus have more in common than we can imagine (Jhally 1989; Twitchell 2004). For example, Mara Einstein (2007) parallels the theoretical processes of religious conversion and product acceptance. She demonstrates how the institutions of marketing and religion work in symbiosis and share many similarities:

These institutions both rely on storytelling, meaning making and a willingness to believe in what is intellectually unbelievable. Religions create meaning through myths, rituals and practices; Marketing creates meaning through advertising and shopping; Religion is the acceptance of a belief system; Marketing is the acceptance of beliefs about a product. Religions have faith communities; Marketing has brand communities. Religion has become a product; Products have become religions.(Einstein 2007, p. 7-8)

Einstein (2007) belongs to a tradition of scholars who emphasize the fusion between the sacred and the profane in marketing and commercialism (see the work of Belk, Wallendorf and Sherry 1989; deChant 2002; Ostwalt 2003; Twitchell 2004). These authors have demonstrated how our own experience with products and commodities elicit feelings that are usually associated with the sacred. This type of research sheds some light on the various points of intersection between religion/spirituality and marketing and why the two can work together.

Hirschman (1985) emphasizes how the natural and the super-natural intertwined in consumption. She claims that: "the attempt to segregate them in theory – especially with the all too frequent assumption that secular interests dominate spiritual ones – is false." (Hirschman 1985, p. 144) She introduces the notion of primitive spirituality (primitive in the sense of original, primeval and little evolved) and describes how it suffuses modern consumption. Nowadays, this point receives extra validation since the institution of advertising plays a larger role in filling in for other social and religious institutions which have experienced a decline (Jhally 1989; Goodman and Dretzin 2004).

Aaker (1996) suggests that brands are comprised of so many components that have nothing to do with product characteristics or their uses, and he names a few: associations, imagery, self-expression, emotions, symbols and so on. We know objects serve as symbols for something else. For centuries, humans have used objects in rituals and spiritual ceremonies. People observe objects, in these occasions, as a tool to connect with greater intangible desires such as love, fulfillment and happiness. The examples for these ideas flow from our everyday experiences. All of us attach the energy or the

consciousness of people to the object that belong to them or associated with them. For example, we bring closer to our heart a shirt or clothes of a beloved one who is gone, but at the same time reject a present from somebody who is jealous of us, regardless of the monetary value of the gift. Therefore, to answer consumers' demands and expectations, marketers understand they need to nourish not only an emotional bond between brand and consumers but a spiritual bond as well (Rickard 1994; Smith 2003).

A recent scientific advancement points at a third neural system in our brain - the Spiritual Quotient (SQ) (Zohar and Marshall 2001) - which can potentially bring the realms of spirituality and advertising even closer. This revelation suggests important ramifications to the field of advertising and the exploration of information processing, which so far considered merely two intermediates – cognition and affect (e.g., Lavidge and Steiner 1961; Ray 1973; Vakratsas and Ambler 1999).

Finally, the concepts of spirituality and advertising share a few common qualities that emphasize the connection between the two concepts. For example, the core idea of 'sharing' which emphasizes the inspiration towards giving and influencing masses of people coincides with the ability of the media to reach out and influence the masses. In the case advertising would present an authentic spiritual message, the media characteristic of reaching out to the masses could be used as a facilitator in the manifestation of true sharing as described in spirituality. Moreover, the core idea of 'transformation' is in the heart of spirituality as well as in advertising. The nature of advertising pushes towards change: change of life style, change of habits, change of loyalties and so on. The purpose, of course, relates to the promotion of new brands or

products, while the benefit of the consumer is sometimes neglected. The change currently portrayed in advertising is very sudden, technical and unreal. Therefore, there is no doubt that the 'change' portrayed in advertising is significantly different from the 'change' meant by spirituality. However, the same essence exists in both contexts, and thus, a change in the 'transformation' concept presented in advertising, potentially could become closer to what is meant by 'change' in spirituality.

After presenting the theoretical connections between spirituality and advertising, the next section will discuss previous research in the area of spirituality and advertising/marketing.

REVIEW OF PAST LITERATURE

When spirituality was examined in the field of **media studies**, it was mostly anchored in the uses and gratifications theoretical framework (Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch 1974). Studies have explored how various audiences use the media to meet their own different spiritual needs (e.g., Drumheller 2005; Kline 2007; Loomis 2004; Mischoulon and Beresin 2004; Rossiter 1999). Some of these explorations demonstrate how several audiences interpret spiritual messages in a personal way, while emphasizing concepts such as contemplation and personal growth (Drumheller 2005; Loomis 2004). Other studies focused on the examination and presence of religious elements (such as religious images and objects) in media contents (Clarke 2005; McKee and Pardun 1996, 1999).

The realm of **consumer behavior and branding** is also relevant to the discussion of advertising and spirituality. Research shows that spirituality plays a role in motivating consumption (Skousgaard 2006): "considered to be the 'life force' by which we act, the spirit is a major driver for human behavior, including consumption." (Skousgaard 2006, p. 294) Skousgaard (2006) attests that only a few studies have focused on spiritually-motivated consumption (SMC), and most of them centered the religious aspects of it. Skousgaard (2006) offers taxonomy of spiritual motivations (i.e. meaning, connection or emotional transcendence) for consumption. With her multi-facet approach to spirituality she matches various types of spiritual motivations to certain types of consumption (for example, individuals who seek inner spiritual connection will be more likely to experience with sky diving activity). Another theoretical contribution arrives from the study of Ball, Hampton, Chronis and Bunker (2001) that developed a theory which connects spiritual development of consumers and consumption. Building on Fowler's (1981) six stages of spiritual development, they graphically demonstrate how spiritual development effects consumer behavior (that is, product or brand choice, possession and consumption and advertising response).

Ger (2005) discusses the paradox between religion and commercialism. While religion has always been against consumption, Ger (2005) describes the emerging of a surprising new sector in consumerism - religious consumerism. He reports how consumers settle the paradox between religion and consumption by injecting "sacred" meaning to the products. Within a similar context, Hirschman (1985) discusses the spirituality of products and aims towards understanding consumer groups that have been

neglected by consumer research. She discusses primitive spirituality that: "permeates the physical sphere of experience, rather than being set apart from it." (Hirschman 1985, p. 144) Later, she connects certain personalities of consumers with the tendency to inject spirituality into products (based on the work of Czikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton on biaxial model of personal orientation in 1982).

The aforementioned studies demonstrate great potential for future research in the area of branding and spirituality. One of the potential areas worth exploration is the realm of brand community, as discussed in the previous chapter. We understand that the basic need of human beings to engage in a community hasn't disappeared but rather has been remodeled. Nowadays, consumers could rally around the brand and create cults or communities around it; and this phenomenon is growing (Brady et al. 2004). Consumers do not see the brand as just a mere product; rather they see in brands opportunity to develop group identity, self-expression and experience (Brady et al. 2004). Strategist Douglas Atkin of the ad agency Merkle and Partners concludes: "People, whether they are joining a cult or joining a brand, do so for exactly the same reasons: they need to belong and they want to make meaning. We need to figure out what the world is all about and we need the company of others. It is simply that." (Atkin, quoted in Goodman and Dretzin 2004)

As a direct result of the realization of these consumer needs, the roles and responsibilities of brand managers have changed dramatically with their job now. Recent research on consumer behavior and branding has examined the links among several consumer constructs. For example, it seems that consumers' satisfaction produces brand

community integration and subsequent consumer loyalty (McAlexander, Kim and Roberts 2003). Crucial relationships between consumers, brands, firms and products have also been examined (McAlexander, Schouten and Koenig 2002); as well as the behavior within the brand community (Bagozzi and Dholakia 2006); and the relationship between Corporate Societal Marketing and the increased sensation of brand community (Hoeffler and Keller 2002). In general, these studies have found that the success of building brand community depends on acts of sharing and giving among the members of the community. These kinds of principles coincide with the core ideas of spiritual people and could be easily applied to consumer behavior of the spiritually-inclined consumer and building a spiritual brand community.

In the field of **spiritual advertising**, research has turned into a few different directions. Some ethical and legal questions about the combination between spirituality and advertising were raised by a few of the scholars (Hoffman and Hoffman 2006; McKee 2000; Pardun 2000). For example, Singh (2005) demonstrated how insensitive use of religious imagery in advertising can hurt the feelings of religious consumers. Several scholars have focused on the use of advertising by religious and spiritual institutions (e.g., Abelman and Hoover 1990; Broyles 2000; Engel 1993; Miller 1981; Percy 2000). Another research explored the meanings consumers make when purchasing Christian products (Haley, White and Cunningham 1999). Additional theoretical advancements in the field are discussed in the previous section.

After making empirical and theoretical connections between the constructs of spirituality and advertising via past literature and research, chapter 4 focuses on the

theoretical framework that has led to the main study of the dissertation – the spirituality in advertising framework. Application of the SAF to the spiritual message is also discussed.

Chapter 4: The Spirituality in Advertising Framework

It was found that scholars in advertising and media studies have defined spirituality in several ways: some focused on religious definitions (Abelman 2006; Baker 2006; Guthrie 2007 McDaniel 1986); others on vague and very general definitions (Elliot 2005); a few had a psychological focus (Mischoulon and Beresin 2004); and several others emphasized an educational point of view (Rossiter 1999). As noted earlier, past research reveals a lack in spirituality definitions that are suitable for the study of advertising; previous definitions tend to be too general or less practical, and thus make the research application process challenging.

Therefore, the current dissertation relies on a practical framework, *The Spirituality in Advertising Framework (SAF)*, which was first developed and presented in the *Journal of Media and Religion*, in an article entitled: "Spirituality in Advertising: A New Theoretical Approach," by Marmor-Lavie, Stout and Lee (2009). The original SAF is a theoretical framework comprised of sixteen core ideas, used as a platform to study: a) spiritually-inclined consumers, and b) spiritual messages in advertising. The core ideas break down the broad and complex concept of spirituality to tools, beliefs and guidelines of how to lead a fulfilled and happy life. As a whole, the core ideas represent a synergetic and holistic framework to assess spirituality in advertising. Although the ideas are connected to each other by being part of the spirituality phenomenon, at the same time they are exclusive, that is, if some core ideas are represented in a certain ad message, other core ideas need not necessarily be represented as well. The core ideas are derived

from the nominal definition of the SAF, which is comprised of the following five main elements: spirituality is broader than religion; centers the notion of meaning; experienced in our day-to-day life; revolves around the notion of suffering; and promotes the achievement of our highest human potential. Marmor-Lavie, Stout and Lee (2009) explain how an extensive review of the spirituality literature (e.g. Allport 1976; Emmons 2006; Forman 2004; Fromm 1967; Kamenetz 1994; Langan 2006; Lew 2005; Schmidt 2005); the compilation of various approaches and disciplines (e.g. Csikszentmihalyi 1988; Frankl 1984; James 1902; Jung 1933; Laing 1968; Leary 2004; Maslow 1965; Neff 2003; Wilson 1982); the insights from Solomon's (2002) definition of naturalized spirituality; the distinction between spirituality and religion (e.g. Elkins et al. 1988; Kale 2004; Marler and Hadaway 2002; Saucier and Skrzypinska 2006; Zinnbauer et al. 1997); the dynamics between emotions and existential questions (Linzer 1996; Solomon 2002); and the viewing of many commercials – have all contributed to the formation of the sixteen core ideas of the SAF.

After the publication of the original SAF, the process of developing the framework has continued and is brought here in the dissertation. Based on the above processes, it was decided to add an additional core idea to the existing sixteen. This idea revolves around the concept of sharing and is fully elaborated upon in the next few paragraphs.

Sharing: Spirituality may not become spirituality if it is finite, that is, spirituality cannot survive if it remains within the boundaries of one person. Naturally, spirituality needs to expand and spread to others (Berg 2009). That is precisely the origin of the act

of sharing. Sharing can be manifested through various forms: money, time, emotions, ideas, experience, consciousness, charity, thoughts, action and more. The individual spiritual/meaning quest cannot be completed without the incorporation of sharing into the process (Frankl 1984; Zohar and Marshall 2001). As human beings, it is our nature to share and to spread energy. Think about a simple example; if we receive good or bad news, our immediate reaction is to share the experience with others. When we engage in higher levels of sharing that involves giving from ourselves to others, true fulfillment can be achieved (Frankl 1984; Salzberg 1997). In those cases where we keep our blessings for ourselves alone, eventually we tend to experience emptiness and stagnation. Think about the metaphor of water; when water keeps flowing, it becomes fresh and clean, however when it sits still, it becomes polluted, unclear and stagnated. The concept of how we share is equally important to the concept of sharing itself. True sharing involves ego-free consciousness, that is, we share while focusing on the best interest of the other person (Batson, Ahmad, Lishner and Tsang 2002). We share not because we want the attention, status, compliments or a sense of importance, but because we see the other person's perspective. Also, getting involved in an act of sharing can not be coerced by anyone; the desire to share needs to evolve naturally and happily from the person who shares. Moreover, giving with some restriction is the true essence of sharing. In other words, giving too much may cause resentment from the receiver. However, if sharing is done with the consciousness of happiness and the other person in mind, while encouraging and guiding the receiver to help him-self/her-self in the process; we achieve a balanced act of sharing, where the giver is also a receiver and vice versa (Berg 2009).

Such type of consciousness will eventually result in great blessings and fulfillment to the person who shares.

After adding the sharing concept to the SAF, it is now comprised of seventeen core ideas instead of sixteen. Table 4.1 showcases and summarizes the seventeen core ideas in a readable and approachable format. It is important to note that table 4.1 presents the summary and evolvement of the SAF; for the original, completed and elaborated SAF (comprised of the sixteen core ideas) see Marmor-Lavie, Stout and Lee (2009).

Table 4.1: A summary of the SAF*

<i>Core Idea</i>	<i>Short Description of The Core Idea</i>
1. The action component	Spiritual people tend to put their spiritual thoughts and emotions into action. They bring spirituality to everyday life and to the behavioral level.
2. The big picture	Spiritual people aspire to connect the dots and see the bigger picture of their life. They seek for meaning and avoid clinging to the five senses experienced in a certain moment. They go beyond it.
3. Letting go	The connotation of this idea is mostly related to the release of our attachments, commonly affiliated with our ego. Letting go of negative feelings, grudges and traumas does not mean we forget about them; on the contrary, we do face, deal and experience with these feelings, but in a healthy way, we eventually let go of them. By letting go we recharge ourselves, and thus some traditions recommend practicing letting go as part of our daily meditation routine (see Lew's (2005) "leave-taking" situations).
4. More than instant gratification	Spiritual people understand there is more to life than succumbing to selfish desires which provide instant gratification. They try to resist these desires by winning higher fulfillment. In consumption this idea relates to the premise that products have energetic meaning, as intended in Feng Shui.
5. Constant examination of life	Spiritual people tend to ask questions about the meaning of life in general and the meaning of their own personal growth and exploration in particular. Nothing is obvious and curiosity is always present.
6. Unity of all mankind	All human beings are connected. Accordingly, we are effected by each other's thoughts and actions as demonstrated in the ripple effect.
7. Integration with others	The interaction with others brings us closer to experience true spirituality. It is only through genuine and influential relationships that we can experience real growth and evolvment.
8. Long-term journey	Spiritual people embark on a journey. The journey is of course internal, has its ups and downs, but yet could have some physical characteristics in it. Spiritual people understand that a journey is an ongoing process which is more important than the final destination or results.
9. Ritualism	Repetitive rituals may constitute prayer, meditation, nature appreciation or anything that helps people to maintain their own spiritual path. Ritualism is a tool that reconnects us with a source of energy which enables us to accomplish genuine growth.
10. Self-actualization	Spiritual people strive to accomplish their highest potential in various realms of life: relationship, career, family, society, creativity and more.
11. Anything is possible	Dreams can turn into a reality. Spiritual people are ready to face their worst fears in order to achieve their greatest dreams and desires. The underling premise suggests that there are no limits for what we can achieve.
12. Live in the present	Being present in the moment is a hard mission to face. Spiritual people try to stay connected to themselves and their environment in a given moment without wondering to past and future events. They attempt to stay complete and in tuned with what life offers now. Csikszentmihalyi (1988) elaborates on that concept in his flow theory.
13. Take responsibility	Spiritual people are encouraged to take responsibility on their own lives and actions. People have free will and thus should be accountable for their decisions.
14. Gratitude	Gratitude is an essential part of being spiritual. Life should not be taken for granted; thus everything we experience, blessings as well as suffering, ought to be appreciated. Appreciation is a key factor to receive more in life.
15. Transformation	The process of transformation has always been part of the spiritual life cycle. People struggle to overcome "automatic" and reactive behavior in order to reach true fulfillment and inner happiness. Constant change is part of the spirituality formula.
16. Suffering	We should all welcome a bit of tension into our lives, since it is only through overcoming it that we gain growth and true fulfillment. Spiritual people acknowledge they have a dark side to them; by embracing our darkness and acknowledging we share the same struggles with the rest of humanity, we ease the process of coping with suffering.
17. Sharing	Spirituality is meant to be shared from one person to another. In those cases where we keep our blessings for ourselves, we tend to experience emptiness and stagnation. Sharing can be manifested through various forms: money, time, emotions, ideas, experience, consciousness, thoughts, action and more. We should also pay attention to how we share. True sharing involves ego-free consciousness, while always bearing in mind the benefit of the other person. Sharing should be a balanced act where the giver is also a receiver and vise versa. Then we achieve true fulfillment.

* For the original, completed and elaborated SAF, see: Marmor-Lavie, Galit, Patricia A. Stout, and Wei-Na Lee (2009), " Spirituality in Advertising: A New Theoretical Approach," *Journal of Media and Religion*, 8(1), 1-23.

The development of the SAF has provided the opportunity for practical and academic research in the realm of spirituality and advertising. The next section describes how the SAF was applied to study the spiritual message in advertising.

APPLICATION OF THE SAF TO STUDY THE SPIRITUAL MESSAGE

Previous Research of the Spiritual Message

As recalled, the SAF was developed to be used in research of: a) the spiritual message, and b) the spiritually-inclined consumer. Since these are the preliminary stages of exploring spirituality in advertising, the first application of the SAF focuses on the spiritual message. Exploration of the spiritual message is the most natural place to begin with when applying a new theoretical framework, since it provides a found grounding for the new phenomenon and its scope.

Previous research of spiritual messages in advertising mostly reveals studies that have used the content analysis method. Content analysis is often used as a method to gauge the occurrence or frequency of occurrence of elements, themes or representations in media content. This is true of past research in spirituality and advertising, where research has focused on religious and spiritual themes, icons/symbols and symbolic representations. Although the content units or representations in this body of research do not mesh with the definition of spirituality in the current dissertation, it is brought in the next few paragraphs to exemplify what has been done so far in the area of spiritual messages in advertising.

Percy (2000) presents a qualitative/ philosophical content analysis of religious advertising in relation to the use of religious imagery in secular advertising. Percy selects a few examples of magazine ads and qualitatively analyzes them in relation to Peter Berger's secularization thesis. Coleman (2008) examines the symbolism of dessert advertising in magazines. She connects dessert advertising with gender, sexual, emotional and spiritual appeals. Via quantitative content analysis, she makes theoretical connections, among others, between spirituality and food advertising (spirituality is measured on dimensions such as "heavenly/sinful" or "temptation/weakness").

Scholars have also explored religious content and the presence of religious themes in advertising (e.g., Barnes 2000; Maddock and Fulton 1996; Maguire and Weatherby 1998; Moore 2005). Both Moore (2005) and Maguire and Weatherby (1998) have used a rigorous content analysis methodology. Nevertheless, their coding schemes were based on religious symbolism alone. For example, some of their recording units were: "depiction of a house of worship; depiction of a member of the clergy; and content featuring any of the following words or symbols: "spiritual," "religious," "God," "soul," or "angel." (Maguire and Weatherby 1998, p. 173) Moore (2005) has also added the coding units of historical places and events with religious significance. Furthermore, he also preformed a qualitative analysis on the ads he found to be "religious." Maguire and Weatherby (1998) analyzed television spots, while Moore (2005) analyzed ad magazines.

The Nature and Interpretation of the SAF in Televised Advertising

This section briefly presents the results of a study which examines the nature and interpretation of the SAF in televised advertising. Television commercials were chosen as the units of analysis since they hold the best potential to manifest and reflect spirituality, compared to other media. It is known in the literature that television is a very engaging type of medium which can best reflect authenticity of the message (Horton and Wohl 1956).

Before applying the SAF to specific television commercials, a preliminary phase was conducted to facilitate the selection of the commercials for this study and to better understand the phenomenon of spiritual advertising. This phase included an examination of 154 television commercials, broadcasted on national television network, during prime time. A careful review of the contents of the ads, via the content assessment method, has yielded a few interesting impressions; first, SAF ideas were identified by the researcher on prime time television ads; second, it seems that product categories such as apparel, car and financial services were mostly associated with the SAF core ideas; third, apparently, SAF ideas in the commercials were more connected with the outdoor setting than the indoor setting; and finally, it seems that positive emotions were more frequently linked with SAF ideas than negative emotions in the commercials.

In this study a thorough exploration of spirituality in advertising was sought. An interpretive-anthropological approach was applied to analyze three televised ads. The goal of the study was to discover how the 17 core ideas are used to interpret spirituality in

televised advertising messages. In other words, how does the SAF work in real advertising?

Method: This study is drawn upon advertising traditions that observe ads as meaningful objects (see McCracken 1986), particularly, the perspective of Scott (1990), who explored the role of music in advertising. Scott expressed skepticism towards ad analysis which separates between the various components of the ad. She takes a holistic/Gestalt approach to study the meaning of advertising:

Just as words in a language become meaningful by virtue of being joined in a system of relationships called a grammar, the elements in a commercial are made meaningful by their relationships to each other...So the combination of non-verbal elements in an ad comes to have meaning via a peculiar sort of grammar that can employ all these symbols simultaneously: words, voice, music, color, shape, and motion. (Scott 1990, p. 6)

This perspective is suitable for the analysis of spiritual messages in ads. Since spirituality is an intangible concept, a holistic approach can best capture its illusive essence. In this study, there is an exploration of how various aspects of the ad, such as executional elements, creative strategies, music, text and content, are bound together in creating the spiritual dimension of advertising.

Following the content assessment procedure, the three ads were selected since they showed a large potential to capture many of the SAF core ideas. The three ads were:

1. Bank of America 2007 television commercial.
2. JCPenney "Today's the Day" 2007 television commercial.
3. Louis Vuitton "Where Will Life Take You?" 2008 television commercial.

Analysis: it is important to note that the original and complete analyses of the first two commercials (the Bank of America 2007 television commercial and the JCPenney “Today’s the Day” 2007 television commercial) is reported in Marmor-Lavie, Stout and Lee (2009). The analysis of the - Louis Vuitton “Where Will Life Take You?” 2008 television commercial – is reported in Marmor-Lavie and Stout (2009) (unpublished paper presented at the American Academy of Advertising). In the following few paragraphs a short summary of the SAF analysis for each commercial is presented.

The Bank of America 2007 television commercial describes different people from various backgrounds who aspire to fulfill their most far fetched dreams, via the help of the Bank of America. SAF analysis showed how core ideas such as ‘self actualization’ or ‘the big picture’ are manifested in the ad through the experiences of the various characters in the ad and the creative techniques used in the commercial. The ad also demonstrates the core idea of ‘transformation’, via the experiences of the characters in the ad that move from stressful situations to success. Additionally, through the successful stories in the commercials, the idea of ‘anything is possible’ is reflected as well.

The JCPenney “Today’s the Day” 2007 television commercial describes everyday situations and focuses on the interactions between family members and friends. The SAF core idea of ‘gratitude’ and appreciation is very prominent in the ad. We witness that via the loving facial expressions of the characters in the ads and some of the text that suggests how precious life is. Additionally, the commercial reflects core ideas which revolve around the notion of human interactions, such as ‘unity of all mankind’ and

‘integration with others.’ The interactions between the various people in the ad influence the characters and also fulfill them.

The Louis Vuitton “Where Will Life Take You?” 2008 television commercial describes the experience of traveling in a very spiritual manner. The ad presents the idea of traveling as an inner journey as much as it is a physical one. Accordingly, the commercial reflects SAF core ideas such as the ‘long-term journey’, ‘transformation’ and ‘letting go’ experiences, through the various sceneries in the ad, the facial expressions of the people presented in the ad and the stirring music in the background. Moreover, the SAF core idea of ‘constant examination of life’ is very prominent in the ad; the text in the commercial and the situations presented in the ad demonstrate how people struggle with the meaning of life and existential questions.

Chapter 4 reviewed the theoretical advancements of the SAF and its application to the spiritual message in advertising. The next phase brings us to the main study of the dissertation which focuses on consumers and how they interact with the spiritual message in advertising. Chapter 5 describes the methods and procedures used in the main study and the rationale behind it.

Chapter 5: Methods

STUDY RATIONALE

It is only natural that after an exploration of the spiritual message, as seen in the previous chapter, the next step would lead to human subjects. Several reasons for choosing human subjects as the focus of the main study of the dissertation are listed below:

Justification and advancement of the theoretical findings presented in previous research. Interviewing individuals will add a valuable dimension to the theoretical knowledge already developed in this dissertation. Previous analyses of the spiritually-dense commercials were based on the researcher's observations alone. Accordingly, it is necessary to find out what do individuals think about these commercials; do they see the same spirituality emerging from the spiritually-dense commercials? Do spiritually-dense commercials elicit or trigger spirituality in people?

The SAF was originally and specifically tailored to study: a) the spiritual message and b) the spiritually-inclined consumer. Thus, for a full exploration of the SAF, after studying the message, the theoretical guidelines lead to the investigation of people.

Consumers are at the core of advertising research. Occasionally, researchers in the fields of advertising and marketing tend to focus too much on advertising messages, while forgetting the context or the reason behind it – the consumers. People should be at the center of our investigation. We should not forget that people are the reason of why we have spiritually-dense commercials in the first place. Therefore, it is important to study

individuals to understand the context and meaning of any topic in advertising, particularly spirituality.

GOALS AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The main purpose of the proposed study is to further advance the theory and constructs in the field of spirituality and advertising. Specifically, the study sets out two sub-goals: 1) to justify with individuals the appearance of spiritual themes in ads, and 2) to understand the meaning people derive from spiritually-dense ads - on two different levels: a) a personal level and b) a brand/advertising level. The study examines the following research questions: (1) how do individuals make sense of or interpret spiritually-dense ads? (2) Can individuals derive personal or spiritual meaning from spiritually-dense ads? And, (3) can spiritually-dense ads influence individuals' perceptions of the brand, and if so, in what way?

A QUALITATIVE APPROACH TO STUDY ADVERTISING

Meaning-based approaches to advertising claim that consumers process commercials for their meaning rather than for their information (McCracken 1987). Studies have focused on the questions of what consumers do with advertising, how they interpret commercials and what are some of the meanings they inject into the process (Fiske 1989; Hirschman and Thompson 1997; McCracken 1987; Mick and Buhl 1992; Scott 1994). Mick and Buhl (1992) stress the importance of obtaining the consumers' perspective, especially in the context of meaning-based studies in advertising: "to

advance theory and research we must look on advertising more thoroughly through the consumer's eyes." (p.317)

Indeed, some meaning-based studies of advertising have turned to consumers and utilized the qualitative approach (Hirschman and Thompson 1997; Mick and Buhl 1992). "When the goal is understanding what the meanings are to actors [by extension, consumers or individuals] rather than predicting what their behavior will be...qualitative methods are often the most appropriate tact." (Drumwright 1996, p.72) Qualitative research is both widespread and varied in marketing and consumer research (Drumwright 1996; Belk 2006). In the field of advertising, an impressive body of qualitative research has accumulated since the 1980s (Scott 2006). Scott (2006) describes the effect of qualitative research on the advertising domain: "qualitative researchers opened the door to the indeterminacy of reading [i.e., consumers' interpretations to advertising], to the reality of advertising as a cultural practice, and ultimately to the larger social questions that attend any purposive attempt to encourage consumption in post-industrial society." (Scott 2006, p.59)

Since the current research revolves around larger social/human questions, draws upon meaning-based approaches to advertising, and focuses on individuals, it was determined that a qualitative approach is the most suitable here. Moreover, the field of spirituality and advertising, as defined in the current dissertation, is still new, and thus requires qualitative methods to strengthen its theory and generate new theoretical ideas. It is known that qualitative methods can assist in building a theory and better constructs, especially in cases where previous research is scant (Glaser and Strauss 1967). Also,

because of the sensitive and complex nature of the spirituality concept, a non-quantitative, more open and flexible approach is needed. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985, p.40): "[qualitative methods] are more adaptable to dealing with multiple (and less aggregatable) realities;...because qualitative methods are more sensitive to and adaptable to the many mutually shaping influences and value patterns that may be encountered."

Method: In-Depth Interviews

To learn about individuals' interpretations of ads, interviewing is the easiest and most direct method. Different methods of interviewing vary on their level of structure. Structured interviews are mostly referred to as "focused" interviews, while unstructured are referred to as "depth," "elite" or "clinical" interviews (Lincoln and Guba 1985). Structured interviews are usually conducted when a great theoretical knowledge is known and the researcher needs to fill a few gaps, while unstructured interviews leave the design and structure to the participants (Aberbach and Rockman 2002; Lincoln and Guba 1985).

The current study employed a qualitative research methodology. Twenty nine semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted with students from various student organizations, at the University of Texas at Austin, by the author. In-depth interviews are a common method used in marketing and consumer behavior research (Cotte & Kistruck 2006), especially when the goal is to understand what the meanings are to people, as in the current study (Drumwright 1996).

Two philosophical approaches to in-depth interviews (suggested by Alvesson 2003) are mostly used in marketing and consumer behavior research (Cotte and Kistruck

2006). The first is called neopositivism and encourages the approach of interview as an instrument, while the second is called romanticism and encourages the approach of interview as a human encounter (Cotte and Kistruck 2006, p.467). As the former carries a quantitative/rigorous flavor, the latter takes the time to view the world from the informant's perspective. The romanticism approach (Alvesson 2003) is the dominant philosophy for in-depth interviews in the area of consumer research (Cotte and Kistruck 2006), and was used in the current study.

A General Overview of the Current Study

In general, the interview session (including a written questionnaire) was designed to answer the previously discussed research questions and is comprised of three steps. In step one respondents were interviewed with respect to how they interpret three televised ads (two spiritually-dense ads and one ad that is not spiritually dense). In step two, respondents filled out a paper and pencil questionnaire which requires: 1) the ranking of 17 belief statements, which were developed from the Spirituality in Advertising Framework (see Marmor-Lavie et. al. 2009), and 2) answering 7 demographic questions. The purpose of the second step was to learn more about participants' spiritual inclination and demographic profile. In step three, a short debriefing about the study took place and some concluding questions about spirituality and advertising were asked. After step three, each participant received a \$10 gift card for participation.

Television Ads' Sampling

This study focuses on television ads as the stimuli of the current exploration due to reasons suggested earlier in this dissertation. The following four ads (a short description of each ad is provided below) comprised the ads' pool for the current study:

1. **Bank of America ad** (30 seconds long, also named BOA_30 seconds commercial): this ad is very factual. Through numbers written on a balance sheet, it shows how the Bank of America has been helping with mortgages in the first quarter of the year.
2. **Bank of America ad** (60 seconds long, also named BOA_60 seconds commercial): this ad describes different people from various backgrounds who aspire to fulfill their most far fetched dreams, via the help of the Bank of America.
3. **Louis Vuitton ad** (90 seconds long, also named LV commercial): this ad describes the experience of traveling in a very spiritual manner. The ad presents the idea of traveling as an inner journey as much as it is a physical one.
4. **Liberty Mutual ad** (60 seconds long, also named LM commercial): the concept of sharing is prominently emphasized in this commercial. The ad demonstrates how the making of little acts of sharing can effect so many people, in so many ways, that eventually, in a circular/magical way, it comes back right at us.

All four commercials are existing commercials that have been broadcast on U.S. television in the past three years. During the study, these commercials were watched by

participants directly from the YouTube website, in their original formats. The last three ads listed above (the Bank of America ad (60 seconds long), the Louis Vuitton ad and the Liberty Mutual ad) were chosen to be included in the pool since they are spiritually-dense ads, that is, they contain many spiritual themes in their messages. The first ad listed above (The Bank of America ad (30 seconds long)) was selected for the purposes of comparison since it carries the same brand name as the second commercial, however is not spiritually-dense. It was interesting to see how participants compared between the two Bank of America commercials, based on the ads' level of spirituality (spiritually-dense vs. not spiritual at all). Moreover, the Bank of America's brand name was selected as the brand name for comparison in this study because it is the most common and relevant brand name for the students population, comparing to the other brand names in the pool. Students are familiar with the Bank of America brand name and probably had some banking experience in the past.

Each participant was exposed to only three television ads from the pool: the two Bank of America commercials and a third ad alternating between the Louis Vuitton ad and the Liberty Mutual ad. Half of the participants had the Louis Vuitton ad as their third ad option and the other half had Liberty Mutual as their third ad option. Rotating the third ad yields a more comprehensive and varied set of data. It is also beneficial for triangulation purposes, as will be discussed later. Participants indicated the order in which they preferred to discuss the television ads (see Mick & Buhl 1992 for the same method approach). By letting participants choose the order of discussion, we avoid some

of the biases that could have emerged, should the researchers' have selected the order of discussion by themselves.

PARTICIPANTS

Participants were undergraduate students (except for two who were graduate students) from various student organizations across campus. Students were selected as the study population to avoid stereotypical selection of participants, in regards to who is more spiritual and who is less. It was determined that the variation, among participants, in regards to their spiritual inclination should emerge from the data and not from the researchers' biased selections. Therefore, in an attempt to avoid the inclusion of prejudged populations in the study, such as a group of priests, it was decided to select students as the core population of the investigation. Students are perceived as an impartial population, whereas possible extraneous variables, such as age, Social Economic Status, gender and "spiritual inclination" are controlled for. At the same time, various students come from different backgrounds, and thus could provide with a rich, varied and interesting set of data.

Participants' Sampling

Participants were purposively sampled in this study. The purposive sampling method is used to select cases that represent relevant dimensions of the population. In general, qualitative methods tend to rely on purposeful sampling rather than on representative sampling (Lincoln & Guba 1985). Since this is a first attempt to discuss spirituality and advertising (as we define it) with human subjects, it was a logical choice

to begin with critical cases sampling, whereas the researcher picks up critical cases from the population to "permit maximum application of information to other cases because, if it's true of critical cases, it is also likely to be true of all other cases." (Lincoln & Guba 1985. p. 102) In an attempt to tap into the various and extreme dimensions of spirituality among the students' population, it was decided to choose students who represent three major types of critical cases, in respect to spirituality; and they were: students with a religious orientation to spirituality, students with a new age orientation to spirituality and students with no declared orientation to spirituality, on the surface. Students from each of these three major groups were recruited from the corresponding students' organizations (for more information about recruitment procedures see the next section). In general, recruitment was managed in two parallel ways: 1) via the students' organizations and their representatives, and 2) through the utilization of snowball sampling. The snowball method of sampling: "identifies cases of interest from people who know people who know what cases are information-rich." (Miles & Huberman 1994) Via the snowball procedure, informants could direct the researcher to more critical cases inside each of the three major groups.

Sources of Participants and Recruitment Procedures

Twenty nine undergraduate students were recruited from various student organizations across the University of Texas at Austin campus. The names and contacts of the selected student organizations were obtained from the following website that lists

all student organizations according to their type (i.e., professional, religious, special interest, etc'):

<http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/sald/studentorgs/vieworgs.php?show=types>

As stated earlier in the sampling section, three major types of students, in respect to spirituality, were selected: students with a religious orientation to spirituality, students with a new age orientation to spirituality and students with no declared orientation to spirituality, on the surface. To locate the three different types of students, recruitment was made in corresponding student organizations. The following are the three major types of organizations, including some of the names of the specific organizations recruitment was actually made from: conventional religious organizations (Baptist Student Ministry, Texas Hillel, Asian American Campus Ministry and Texas Wesley), organizations inclined to new age spirituality (the UT yoga Club, Art of living and Universal Link for Inner Growth) and organizations with no inclination to spirituality (e.g., recruitment was made from Students' Sports Clubs such as power lifting, Women water polo team, UT sports Tae Kwon Do, UT Judu club and so on). An attempt was made to recruit about 10 students from each of the three major types of organizations. Eventually, 10 students were recruited from the religious groups, 11 students from the sports groups and 8 students from the new age groups, for a total of 29 students. Recruitment procedures unfolded as follows: first, a contact was made with each of the representatives of the selected student organizations. The same website that lists all student organizations also provides a contact person for each of the organizations. Therefore, the author contacted each of these representatives via one of the following methods: phone, e-mail or a face-

to-face visit to the organization's site (see Appendix D for the script of the recruitment conversation with the contact person). Second, the author sent/showed the representatives a recruitment ad for the study (see Appendix E). They agreed to assist in one or more of the following manners: some posted the ad on the organization's billboards, others sent the ad as an e-mail to the organization's listserv and a few invited the author to one of the organization's gatherings to recruit students from there. Third, students who saw the ad and were interested in participating in the study contacted the author and an interview was scheduled. Finally, another route of recruitment was utilized at the end of each interview- the snowball sampling route. Once an interview with a student was complete, the researcher asked the participant whether s/he knows of a member in their student organization, who would be willing to participate in the study. Next, the researcher provided the participant with a printed sheet of paper, containing the researcher's contact information, to give to their peers, in case they wanted to be interviewed (See Appendix C for the debriefing section).

Characteristics and Presentation of the Participants

A questionnaire was used to obtain participant characteristics (see Appendix B), which are reported in the sections below. The questionnaire was comprised of two parts: 1) seventeen belief statements, which were developed from the Spirituality in Advertising Framework (see Marmor-Lavie et. al. 2009), and 2) seven demographic questions. The purpose of the questionnaire was to learn more about participants' spiritual inclination and demographic profile.

It is important to note, at this point, that the purpose of the quantitative analysis presented in the current dissertation and in the remaining of this chapter is not to suggest generalizability of the data or the population; it is merely brought here as an additional piece of information that should be considered with its limitations.

Participant Socio-Demographic Characteristics

The socio-demographic characteristics of twenty nine students are summarized in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1: Demographic characteristics of study participants.

Demographic Characteristics (N=29)	% (n)
Sex of Participant	
Female	58.6% (17)
Male	41.4% (12)
Age by Categories	
18-20	44.8% (13)
21-22	41.4% (12)
27-34	13.6% (4)
Ethnicity	
Anglo American	44.8% (13)
Asian American	13.8% (4)
Hispanic American	24.1% (7)
Multiracial	13.8% (4)
Middle Eastern	3.4% (1)
Marital Status	
Single, never married	82.8% (24)
Married	3.4% (1)
In a committed relationship	13.8% (4)
Group	
Sports	37.9% (11)
Religious	34.5% (10)
New Age	27.6% (8)

Generally speaking, the twenty nine participants represent a young audience, in its early twenties, unmarried (82.8%), as expected from an undergraduate crowd. Most of the interviewees were females (58.6%), although the male population was adequately represented (41.4%). As far as the ethnicity range, the majority of participants were Anglo-Americans (44.8%), while other groups followed behind: Hispanic Americans with 24.1%, Asian Americans with 13.8 %, Multiracial groups with 13.8% and Middle Eastern with 3.4%. Overall, the twenty nine students who participated in the study came from three major types of student organizations: 37.9% from sports organizations, 34.5% from religious organizations and 27.6% from New Age organizations; approximately an even distribution among the three groups.

Ranking Spiritual Belief Statements

As noted before, participants were asked to rank 17 belief statements about their spirituality (See Appendix B for the complete set of statements). Informants were asked to rank their level of agreement with each of the statements on a 4-level scale, whereas 1 is agree strongly, 2 is agree somewhat, 3 is disagree somewhat and 4 disagree strongly. Table 5.2 summarizes the results.

Table 5.2: Frequencies of the Spiritual Belief Statements

Statement (Q _{number})	Agree Strongly	Agree Somewhat	Disagree Somewhat	Disagree Strongly
Experience (Q ₁)	44.8%	41.4%	10.3%	3.4%
Big Picture (Q ₂)	58.6%	34.5%	6.9%	0%
Comfort (Q ₃)	13.8%	58.6%	13.8%	13.8%
Reactive (Q ₄)	10.3%	13.8%	55.2%	20.7%
Meaning (Q ₅)	55.2%	24.1%	10.3%	10.3%
Unity (Q ₆)	72.4%	24.1%	3.4%	0%
Connect (Q ₇)	37.9%	55.2%	6.9%	0%
Journey (Q ₈)	37.9%	34.5%	17.2%	10.3%
Pray (Q ₉)	31.0%	24.1%	17.2%	27.6%
Potential (Q ₁₀)	55.2%	44.8%	0%	0%
Dreams (Q ₁₁)	69.0%	24.1%	6.9%	0%
Moment (Q ₁₂)	41.4%	34.5%	13.8%	10.3%
Lesson (Q ₁₃)	34.5%	41.4%	20.7%	3.4%
Gratitude (Q ₁₄)	69.0%	17.2%	10.3%	3.4%
Compassion (Q ₁₅)	24.1%	34.5%	27.6%	13.8%
Exploration (Q ₁₆)	51.7%	37.9%	6.9%	3.4%
Meditation (Q ₁₇)	27.6%	20.7%	31.0%	20.7%

Table 5.2 indicates that a few of the statements were prominent among the participants' evaluations –these are the statements which received more than 50% of the participants' strong agreement. Among them were the following statements: seeing the big picture, searching for the meaning of life, unity of all mankind, seeking to seize one's potential, believing in dreams that turn into a reality, having appreciation for life and seeking to know oneself. These statements' rankings received more support after participants watched the commercials and expressed their affinity with these ideas (see chapter 6).

Presentation of the Participants

Brief personal introduction for each participant is depicted in Table 5.3. The table presents participants' identity number, affiliation group and some demographic facts. Also, a spirituality ranking score is provided for each participant. These scores are based

on each participant's ranking of the 17 belief statements and were created as follows. After recoding statement number 4, a spirituality index score was developed for each participant. Each participant index score was comprised of the addition of all 17 individual rankings and ranged between 17 (a person who answered 1 to all the statements, that is strongly agreed with all the statements) and 68 (a person who answered 4 to all the statements, that is strongly disagreed with all the statements). Once each participant had an individual index score, a spirituality ranking score was assigned to him/her, based on the comparison with other participants' index scores. The lowest individual index score received the highest spirituality ranking score, while the highest individual index score received the lowest spirituality ranking score. The table presents the spirituality ranking scores for each individual, whereas ranking number one means that the participant mostly identified with the spiritual statements, while ranking number 17 means that the participant was the least to identify with the statements. It is important to note that the purpose of these ranking scores is not to suggest that one individual is more spiritual than the other, but just to provide another piece of information about the study's informants.

Table 5.3: Participant Profile

Participant ID	Group	Demographics	Spirituality Ranking Score
1	Sports	20 years old, undergraduate student, Anglo American female.	10
2	Sports	21 years old, undergraduate student, Anglo American female.	9
3	Sports	19 years old, undergraduate student, Hispanic American female.	8
4	Sports	21 years old, undergraduate student, Multiracial female.	11
5	Sports	22 years old, undergraduate student, Multiracial male.	10
6	Sports	22 years old, undergraduate student, Anglo American male.	11
7	Sports	21 years old, undergraduate student, Asian American male.	14
8	Sports	20 years old, undergraduate student, Multiracial male.	14
9	Sports	19 years old, undergraduate student, Asian American male.	11
10	Sports	21 years old, undergraduate student, Hispanic American male.	12
11	Religious	21 years old, undergraduate student, Hispanic American female.	17
12	Sports	19 years old, undergraduate student, Anglo American female.	13
13	Religious	20 years old, undergraduate student, Multiracial female.	10
14	Religious	18 years old, undergraduate student, Anglo American female	9
15	Religious	20 years old, undergraduate student, Anglo American female	6
16	Religious	21 years old, undergraduate student, Anglo American female.	3
17	Religious	18 years old, undergraduate student, Anglo American male	16
18	New Age	34 years old, graduate student, Middle Eastern female	15
19	Religious	18 years old, undergraduate student, Asian American female.	3
20	New Age	27 years old, graduate student, Hispanic American female.	2
21	New Age	22 years old, undergraduate student, Asian American female.	14
22	New Age	19 years old, undergraduate student, Hispanic American female.	3
23	New Age	22 years old, undergraduate student, Anglo American male.	1
24	New Age	32 years old, undergraduate student, Anglo American male.	8
25	Religious	20 years old, undergraduate student, Hispanic American male.	11
26	New Age	19 years old, undergraduate student, Anglo American male.	7
27	Religious	21 years old, undergraduate student, Anglo American male.	4
28	New Age	28 years old, undergraduate student, Hispanic American female.	3
29	Religious	21 years old, undergraduate student, Anglo American female.	5

RESEARCH PROTOCOL

Twenty nine interviews took place between the period of October 2009 and December 2009. Each student respondent was interviewed individually and in private by the author, in a secure room in the PCL library, located on the UT campus. The researcher's laptop was used by the respondent to watch the study's commercials. Each individual interview session took about an hour; including, the ads' interpretation section that lasted for about 40 minutes, the written questionnaire section that took approximately 10 minutes, and the debriefing with the concluding remarks section that took no longer than 7-8 minutes.

Overall, the entire interview session (including a written component) was comprised of 5 small parts: First, upon arrival to the interview session, participants were informed that the interview is audio recorded and that written notes will also be taken during the course of the interview. Participants were also told about the confidentiality of their identity and that they may decline to respond to any questions at any time. Next, participants signed the consent form and were offered a copy of the form as well.

Second, participants were informed that the research topic is about interpreting television ad messages that will be watched directly from the YouTube website. In this phase, participants were also told that the entire interview session is divided into three major parts: ad interpretation, a written questionnaire to fill out and a short debriefing of the study with a final discussion at the end. Finally, they learned that the entire interview session (including a written questionnaire) will take no longer than about an hour.

Third, in the first part of the interview session, informants were asked a few grand tour (i.e., very general) questions about their student organization and television consumption (See appendix A for the interview protocol). Next, participants were asked to choose the order in which they preferred to discuss the three television ads that they watched directly from the YouTube website. For this procedure, the researcher showed participants three cards, each corresponding to one ad. The brand name and the time-span of each ad were written on each corresponding card. The order in which the cards were selected by the participants determined the order of the discussion. Each participant watched on YouTube a sample of 3 ads: two Bank of America ads, and a third ad alternating between a Louis Vuitton ad and a Liberty Mutual ad. About half of the participants were shown the Louis Vuitton ad as their third ad option, and the other half was shown the Liberty Mutual ad as their third ad option. After selecting the order of discussion, participants were instructed to start watching the first ad directly from YouTube whenever they were ready. Then, participants were asked about their interpretation of the ad and about the meanings of the ad to them, on a personal level and on a brand-level (see appendix A for the interview protocol). Subsequently, they were instructed to start watching the second ad directly from YouTube whenever they were ready and asked to answer the same set of questions, as described after watching the first ad. Finally, they were instructed to start watching the third ad directly from YouTube whenever they were ready and interpret it according to the same set of questions reported in the previous ads.

Fourth, in the second part of the interview session, participants were asked to fill out a paper and pencil questionnaire (see appendix B). The questionnaire was comprised of two sections. In the first section participants were asked to rank 17 belief statements about their spirituality; these statements were developed from the Spirituality in Advertising Framework (Marmor-Lavie et. al. 2009). The statements were extracted from the definitions of the SAF core ideas, described in chapter 4. Each statement reflects the meaning of a certain core idea. After the formulation of the statements the four point scale system was applied to them. In the second section participants were asked to answer seven demographic questions about their age, gender, ethnicity, marital status, hobbies and education (see appendix B).

Finally, in the last part of the interview session, participants were debriefed about the study (see appendix C for the debriefing) and learned that spirituality is a major concept in the current exploration. More specifically, they were informed that the study explores the interaction between individuals and spiritual themes in ads. Next, respondents were asked to shortly describe what does spirituality mean to them, and then to compare the three ads they just saw, based on their account. The purpose of these questions was to learn more about the world of the respondents and to better understand why they interpret the ads as they do, especially when the concept of spirituality is on their minds.

After the interview was over, each respondent received a \$10 gift card (for a local retail) for participation in the study (see appendix F for the \$10 gift card receipt form). At the very end, the researcher asked participants whether they knew a member in their

student organization who would be willing to participate in the study. If they did know someone, the researcher provided the participant with a printed sheet of paper, containing the researcher's contact info, to give to their friends, in case they would like to be interviewed (see appendix C).

Confidentiality

Privacy and Confidentiality of Participants

In order to ensure that responses are not linked to individual participants, a random and confidential identification number was assigned to each participant's consent form (see appendix G for the consent form). Participants were informed of this before the interview began and also received a copy of the consent form (see appendix G for the consent form). No indication of the participant's name or identification was made while audio recording. Participants were informed that they may skip any questions they do not feel comfortable answering and that they may withdraw from the study at any time

Confidentiality of the Research Data

The digital audio recordings and interview transcripts are stored in on a password protected computer. Respondents' signed consent forms, brief field notes, journal of the researcher, gift cards' receipts and paper and pencil questionnaires, are all kept in a physically different location – in a locked file cabinet. Only the Principal investigator (the author) and faculty Supervisor have access to the data files. The digital audio-recordings are coded so no personally identifying information is visible on them. The written

transcripts and audio recordings of the interviews are retained for possible future analysis.

DATA ANALYSIS

Data consisted of the interviews recordings, brief field notes, paper and pencil questionnaires and the personal journal of the researcher.

Analysis of the interview transcripts was inspired by the theoretical constant comparative method, suggested by Glaser and Strauss in 1967. In practice, the data was analyzed through standard qualitative data analysis methods, including Miles and Huberman's (1994) coding and data preparation procedures and Strauss's (1987) analysis procedures suggested in his book: *Qualitative Analysis for Social Scientists*.

The process of analyzing the interview transcripts consisted of several stages, listed below:

First, the author created for each interview recording a version of the Contact Summary Sheet, suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994, p.53). The purpose of this sheet was to organize the data in a manner that won't allow data to get lost. Each interview recording was transcribed and put into the format of the Contact Summary Sheet (see appendix H for the Contact Summary Sheet of this study). Basically, the sheet format was comprised of three parts: the first section included some administrative and media consumption information about the contact; the second section comprised of the participant's responses to the three ads; and finally, the third section included questions about spirituality, comparison between the ads and some ethical issues.

Second, at the end of each interview transcription, the author followed the suggestion of Strauss (1987) and created a memo to summarize what was striking about a particular interview session (also suggested by Miles and Huberman 1994). The memo was added as the last section of each participant's Contact Summary Sheet, in the format of a question (see appendix H).

Third, once all transcriptions and the initial memos were completed, a more detailed analysis was applied. Attention was first given to the within-case level, whereas the art of coding has been implemented on each individual's transcription. Interviews were mostly coded according to the Miles and Huberman's (1994) coding system. According to their approach, the codes are created in a reduction process of the data; from the smallest details to the biggest generalizations. Coding begins with a first-level coding which is a "device for summarizing segments of data." (Miles and Huberman 1994, p.69) First-level coding is very descriptive, while further levels of coding are more interpretative and inferential. From early levels of coding the researcher reaches the level of pattern coding. According to Miles and Huberman (1994, p.69): "pattern coding is a way of grouping those summaries [first-level coding] into a smaller number of sets, themes, or constructs. For qualitative researchers, it's an analogue to the cluster-analytic and factor-analytic devices used in statistical analysis." During the coding phase, the method of writing reflective remarks (Miles and Huberman 1994), on the side of the text or in parenthesis, was also applied in the current study. In the coding phase some initial categories or themes have begun to surface from the data (see Drumwright 1996).

Fourth, after the completion of coding, a cross-case analysis was applied, meaning, the analysis progressed through the constant comparison between the various participants' responses. During this phase, the author repetitively read and re-read the transcripts, while looking across the interviews. This circular procedure yielded more memos, followed by emerging themes and relevant categories that were examined to fit the data (Drumwright 1996; Strauss 1987).

Fifth, a major analytical memo was written which combines together all previous memos with their emerging themes. Appropriate quotations were placed under each emerging theme or category to justify the analysis and better explain the findings to the readers. This process is similar to the selective coding process, suggested by Strauss (1987).

Finally, once again the data was scrutinized, while themes and categories were refined. In this process some of the themes were dropped, others collided together and the entire memo document was set and organized in a comprehensive and inherent manner.

In order to analyze the written questionnaires, a quantitative analysis was utilized, while using the SPSS computer program. It is important to note that the purpose of the quantitative analysis presented in the current dissertation is not to suggest generalizability of the data or the population; it is merely brought here as an additional piece of information that should be considered with its limitations. First, a basic descriptive analysis of the 17 belief statements was applied; meaning, a frequency analysis for each statement was obtained (see table 5.2). Moreover, a spirituality index was created for each participant, based on the computation of all 17 statements into a single score. These

scores are based on each participant's ranking of the 17 belief statements. Then, each participant received a ranking spirituality score, whereas ranking number one means that, among the 29 interviewees, the participant mostly identified with the spiritual statements, while ranking number 17 means that, among the 29 interviewees, the participant was the least to identify with the statements (see table 5.3). Finally, a simple frequency analysis was performed on the demographic questions that appeared in the questionnaire (see table 5.1).

QUALITY CONTROL

In qualitative research, investigators discuss the issue of quality control (Smith and Robbins 1984); in other words, has the process of research been done with a reasonable care? (Miles and Huberman 1994)

Miles and Huberman (1994) discuss the question of internal validity and authenticity. In internal validity we look for the truth of the data and the findings. Miles and Huberman (1994) referred to the tools of the qualitative researcher to measure internal validity as understanding. In strengthening the internal validity of the qualitative study, Miles and Huberman (1994) offer researchers to think of the richness of their descriptions (or how "thick" the descriptions are), triangulation of the data, the linkage between the data and the theoretical categories, checking and re-examining rival explanations and more.

In the current study to enhance trustworthiness, triangulation efforts were made. First, the selection of participants from three major different groups brings diverse and

contradicting perspectives to the data; this increases the "thickness" of the study's descriptions. Also, within each group, an attempt was made to select as varied population as possible. Second, the fact that some participants viewed alternative ads also increases the chances of receiving a more comprehensive and trustworthy set of data. Third, to ensure the accuracy of the data, reflective remarks of the researcher were recorded separately from the raw data in a journal or a special memo. Finally, the procedure of member checks was applied in the current study. Transcripts were sent to five of the study's participants, each individual received his or her own transcripts to review. It was insured that participants from each of the three major groups were included in this procedure. All five participants responded and confirmed the validity of their transcripts.

The issue of external validity is less prominent in the context of qualitative research since its findings cannot be generalized to the population. However, external validity can be achieved in qualitative research over time. Thus, it is important to think about the aggregated effect of one single study and its larger import to other situations. In the current study this issue was approached by creating as rich of a sample as possible.

After the completion of the data collection, chapter 6 presents the interpretation of the data and analysis procedures performed in the current study.

Chapter 6: Interpretation of Data

The presentation of the data is organized according to the three main Research Questions of the study. The first section describes how participants interpret the spiritual ads and consists of 4 parts, including: the descriptions of existing SAF ideas in the commercials, the descriptions of additional spiritual ideas in the commercials (on top of the established 17 SAF ideas), the use of spiritual terminology by participants and the specific explanations participants provide for each ad.

The second section emphasizes the personal meanings which surfaced from the commercials. This section portrays participants' personal interactions with the ads, organized around the various meanings that have emerged from the data.

The third section presents branding and advertising issues raised by participants. This section is comprised of four major issues (attitudes towards advertising and branding, the influence of spiritual advertising, self and identity in relation to the brand and product category), which emerged from the data.

Overall, the participants' responses and interactions with the ads are understood through their statements from the interviews. Therefore, direct quotes from the participants' responses, which explain and support the interpretation of the data, are presented throughout the chapter. Participants are referred by their participant ID number, as explained in table 5.3 (to learn more about each participant profile see table 5.3).

Right through the chapter and in general, the names of the study's commercials appear in their abbreviated form. Herein below is the key for the abbreviated names: the

30 seconds Bank of America ad also named BOA_30; the 60 seconds Bank of America ad also named BOA_60; the Louis Vuitton ad also named LV; and the Liberty Mutual ad also named LM.

FIRST SECTION: “SEEING” SPIRITUAL THEMES IN COMMERCIALS

One of the main goals of the current study was to find out whether participants recognize spiritual themes in spiritually-dense commercials. Findings show that subjects indeed spotted spiritual themes in the ads. To establish that assertion, this section demonstrates how participants have captured the spiritual essence of the commercials, via four different ways that have emerged from the data. The first presentation of this section begins with participants’ descriptions of existing SAF ideas that emerged from the data. The purpose of this presentation was to justify with participants previous SAF analyses. Indeed, the majority of the participants’ responses show how SAF ideas were naturally recognized by respondents, as a reaction to watching the commercials.

The second presentation of this section focuses on additional spiritual ideas that were observed by participants and naturally surfaced from the data (in addition to the identified 17 SAF ideas discussed in chapter 4). These ideas, which were brought forward by participants, could be incorporated in future development of the SAF.

The third presentation of this section centers the use of spiritual terminology by participants. This presentation has also emerged from the data and is brought here to demonstrate how the spiritually-dense commercials have triggered participants to think in clear spiritual terms.

Finally, the fourth presentation of this section is organized by the spiritually-dense ads and emphasizes the main points of each commercial, as they were expressed by participants.

All presentations combine direct quotes from the interviews which represent the spirit of the participants' responses.

Supporting Existing SAF Ideas

The majority of the participants gave descriptions of the commercials that correspond with the ideas presented at the SAF. This part will present a few examples, starting with the idea of responsibility which was mentioned a few times by interviewees and is summarized by participant #19: "It definitely teaches you, not only does it promote their bank or their insurance company, it shows people how life should be, how we should act towards one another and how as a community we should be caring enough to watch over people who even though we don't know, we still have to assume some responsibility for them." And she adds: "we are almost all like brothers and sisters in the world; it is kind of like we are always watching over each other." (19, p.2)

The concept of sharing repeatedly emerged from the data, as a response to the LM commercial. Interviewees recognized various aspects of the sharing concept; one of them focuses on the intention behind the activity of sharing:

it is a very good ad...I guess you really don't want to portray an ad showing that you give something, expecting something in return; you just want to show that people can be nice to each other, and if you show you are giving something and expecting something in return, I guess it is not really the same as just helping out of good will...so I think it would touch people more emotionally, if they see that

people are helping out of a good will, rather than wanting something in return. (8, p.3)

A few of the interviewees even mentioned some religious innuendos regarding the concept of sharing, as suggested in the response of participant # 9: “do unto others as you would have them do unto you, the Golden rule of just being kind to other people, it is a very Christian idea as well, simply just doing things for other because it is the right thing to do.” (9, p.4) Moreover, several of the participants mentioned that sharing is contagious and causes a chain reaction of good deeds. This concept also meshes with the SAF idea of unity of all mankind, which suggests that all human beings are connected in the great scheme of things and affected by each other. Participant # 9 summarizes this principle:

no matter where you go, you can help out others, and then it doesn't cost much but it can have a lot of long-term impact...you help one person, that person helps someone else, other people see it and then it causes a chain reaction, so your one action starts of a whole series of reactions, and so the result of it is a lot more than just what you do. (9, p.2)

Participant # 26 continues within the same lines:”Just people doing good for other people and helping them out and then it is just a chain, everyone will start helping each other out...it has been said responsibility, so I guess we just need to be responsible for helping each other and doing good.” (26, p.1) Finally, the scenes depicted in the LM commercial reminded many of the participants the movie – “Pay it forward”- which depicts a young boy who begins a chain of good deeds that affects so many people. Participant # 10 is one of the interviewees who noticed the similarities: “I think it takes from other ads and movies like the “pay it forward movie,” kind of a heavy influence of people paying it

forward, acts of kindness...It also reminds me of the foundation for a better life, about kindness, pass it on, it's pretty similar." (10, p.3)

Another SAF idea, anything is possible, was brought up by a few of the participants, as a result of watching the Bank of America 60 seconds commercial. Participants # 9 and # 17 tie this concept with the American dream: "it's pretty uplifting, kind of inspirational, kind of gives you the idea that anybody can do anything...you know, be all you can be American dream type deal," (9, p.1) and Participant # 17 continues: "It has an emotional impact. It sells optimism to people watching it, like they too could, anything is possible because this is the land of opportunity...so somebody watching it could be inspired, could feel hopeful, could feel optimistic." (17, p.2) Participant # 1 talks about personal values and the power to do anything you want: "growing up you are always told that you can do whatever you want... and so again it was like a reinforcement... but also kind of brought in this idea: you can do whatever you want, but you are going to need money to do it, and here is a way to do it." (1, p.3)

The self-actualization SAF idea also surfaced among participants as a result of watching the BOA_60 seconds commercial. Most of the participants talk about seizing opportunities and potential as a response to the ad:

An ad whereas people were looking at a window, and each one of them saw a different situation for themselves or what they could accomplish in their future potentially, and I guess their ideal situation of where they want to be... it was a good message to show that people can achieve more than the current situation that they are already in...so I guess they can do more than what they think they can. (8, p1-2)

Participant # 20 continues: “I guess, you know, opportunity, whenever you are presented with a posing point in your life, then you can really analyze it and see it as an opportunity to either take it, or do you want to take it or incooperate new things into your life, accomplish new things.” (20, p.3) And participant # 11 adds: “BOA can help you reach your goals and accomplish the things you want...Probably will give you a head in life...the whole idea of the American dream...that whole thing that they can help you with the American Dream.” (11, p.2)

The idea of the Journey was discussed on many occasions as a response to the LV commercial. Many of the participants’ accounts portray the journey as a life changing experience: “So you are going to have experiences, and you are going to live and everything else is what’s going to make you who you are... Just live and you will see where they [your experiences] will take you, and it will be different for everyone” (3, p.4); “Talking a lot about the journey, the vacations you take, and the places you go can change who you are ...the journey made the person or the person made the journey...the journey you take or the places you go are really going to affect your character and affect who you are.” (11, p.3)

The transformation idea was expressed by participants and is exemplified by participant # 1 who talked about the transformative quality of the journey of life: “It gives this message of a journey being separate than just a trip or a vacation, and I thought that was very real. There is a trip like you are gonna go, like every weekend, I take a trip and go sailing in a different spot; People take a vacation to get away and relax...and that a journey was something different, something deeper, something that meant to help, find

yourself, center yourself, like on a long term, actually changing yourself... basis.” (1, p.2) Another example is brought by participant # 15 who discusses the importance of having constant transformation and fluidity in life: “I think that’s important what they are trying to get at with this kind of idea, you are creating yourself as you go, I feel like that’s important to just not stand still and be stagnant...that’s cool to just be fluid as you are going, and like enjoy the journey that is life.”(15, p.3)

The idea of thinking about the big picture of life was depicted by interviewees as well. Participant # 15 provided the following description:

This theme of openness, and life being a journey, it’s not a trip or a destination, being very experiential, kind of soaking what’s around you, a lot of different shots, from a lot of different places and things, so it is just this idea of pieces making up the whole, like all your different experiences, and all these different things you have done, or places you have been, or things you have been a part of, kind of come together to create you, as you been on a journey. (15, p.3)

Participant # 6 reacted to the BOA_60 seconds commercial and emphasized the following: “as far as this commercial goes, they are really taking a big step in ignoring the little things, that is the bank’s day to day things, and going straight to big picture things, big picture dreams, big picture, we are going to help you out, we are BOA.” (6, p.2)

Some participants mention how important it is to live in the present while embarking on a journey. Participant # 23 describes the following:

It says the journey is life itself, it doesn’t necessarily have to be about going to some other country, going on a vacation to enjoy yourself. So many people do that, but they don’t necessarily go on a journey, so to speak, because they are, you know, they might go to another country but they are still so caught up in like “oh,

I have got to do this, I have got to take pictures of this so I will remember it later,” that they don’t even experience the place itself. (23, p.3)

The idea of gratitude and appreciation was brought up by participants as well. The response of participant # 2 demonstrates this point: “It means to me to go into experiences all-heartedly and don’t take things for granted, like really absorb as much as I can; to make sure that I am making it the coolest moment that I can... really fun, each shot...even whether it is in solitude in the country or in the city with all the bright lights, to always make sure that I am making my experience, my own.”(2, p.4)

The LV commercial also generated a discussion on self-discovery and the examination of life. Participant #4 gives her perspective on the ad: “This ad is about these people and their interesting little situations, little stories and they are on this great path of self discovery, and they are figuring out who they are by taking all these cool trips, but the real trip is inside, and then every so often they flash the LV logo, and then at the end you find out that it’s an ad for luggage.” (4, p.2) Participant # 2 shares her lessons from the commercial: “You are always going to be working towards something; you are always going to be searching for something. There is always a lot to be explored. So just take advantage of all of that...seeing new things and do new things and experience life along the way.” (2, p.4)

Finally, the action component, as it is described in the SAF, occupies many of our generation’s minds; the interviewees’ reactions indeed reflect that. Many of the participants discuss the importance of being proactive in your own life. Here are two examples:

just because you can have the best bank in the world, but if you don't work hard or if you don't have the right skills or something happens to you, there is no guarantee that you are going to have your goals all just falling to your lap if you are with BOA or any other bank, and so just putting your money with BOA isn't going to make things happen. (4, p.4)

yeh, I guess we are just get caught up doing our day to day, and we have these ideas or dreams or accomplishments that we want to do, and if we don't stop and reflect and maybe take action to make them come true...I guess it is important to pose and reflect and to do some of these things that you always think you want to do...for me one recent example, I always wanted to learn France and also Italian...Now we are looking at jobs in France, and the other day I got this French CD and I was doing stuff around the house and I said I am going to start learning French...It is kind of I took the little one baby step, and then another baby step, and kind of I can see things happening. (20, p.3)

To summarize, participants provided in their descriptions a strong support to the ideas developed in the SAF. Answering the question raised in the beginning of the study: subjects indeed recognized SAF themes in the commercials.

Emerging Additional SAF Ideas

The current presentation of the data focuses on more spiritual ideas that were observed by participants, in addition to the identified 17 SAF ideas, discussed earlier in chapter 4. These ideas, which were naturally brought by participants, are intriguing and could be incorporated in future development of the SAF; accordingly, they are presented in the following few paragraphs.

The concept of faith/hope repeated itself among participants, especially as a response to the BOA_60 seconds commercial. For example, after viewing the commercial, participant # 2 began a conversation on her hopeful outlook towards life:” Even if times are really hard, to do your best to stay positive and maybe look through

some of the red tape, and some of the negative aspects of what's going on, kind of trying to see the silver lining idea, trying to stay positive for the future.” (2, p.2) The hope component is vividly expressed in participant # 3's reaction to the BOA_60 seconds commercial: “how hopeful...that is the whole theme they are going for, like hope... and that they can help you get there...they can help you get where it is you want to be.” (3, p.2)

The spiritual concept of accepting and embracing life to the fullest is prominent in some of the interviewees' responses. The aspect of accepting and embracing life is well described in participant # 3's personal account. As a response to the LV commercial she faces her own dilemmas about the journey of life and the process of embracing it:

Right now I am in college...and so everyone is trying to figure out what is it that I want to do after I will graduate, type of thing...so when you see it, it's kind of gives you that: “it is ok, things will fall into place,” even if, let's say, you don't get the job, for, I don't know, the New York Times or something, as their photographer...there is going to be something else that happens, and it is going to be your journey and you are going to learn from it...it doesn't matter where you thought you are going to be isn't where you are, because even if you do other things, you still going to learn from it and you still going to gain experiences from it. (3, p.4)

She continues: “you see this message around...in poems, in books, in songs...and it's a good message...it just tells you that things are going to happen in your life, and things are going to happen in everyone's life, and just to embrace it...I like the way that they did it.” (3, p.4) Another side to this concept is that people strive to live their life to the fullest. Participants # 6 and # 9 provide the following descriptions: “the wording and the imagery together [of the LV commercial] make it seem that you need to see every experience that

you can, and do as much as you can because if you are not, you are not participating in your own journey, because life is a journey.” (6, p.2) Participant # 9 talks about the same idea, only from a religious angle: “very much in line with it...I firmly believe that God gave us all potential and then for us to truly be happy is that we should live our lives to the fullest, work towards our dreams and aspirations, in line with his plan for us.” (9, P.4) In that context, a few of the participants also raised the topic of experiencing fun in life and how important it is to inject fun in whatever we do:

I am a student so I don't have a lot of disposable income, but, once the recession passes...and if I graduate and get a job, and then I will have more money, in that sense to spend on entertainment purposes, I guess. Aside from that, there is a lot of life to be lived...maybe I haven't run Scuba diving before but there is still time in the future to do that, and that sort of things. I can still accomplish a lot, aside from just work. I am very into traveling and that whole idea, so I think a lot of it in this commercial that resonated with me the most is the idea of I haven't done it before, but I still have time and the energy and all that good stuff to make it happen in the future, so there is fun times ahead. (2, p.3)

Another interesting concept was raised by some of the participants - Destiny vs. Free will. For some of the interviewees, the commercials ignited an inner-conversation about how much control do we really have in life. Participant # 20 clearly describes the philosophical dilemma:

maybe 50%, because I think 50% you have the power and control to manipulate certain things in your life, or do certain things differently, but then there is that 50% or a lot more, there is no really a control, but based on those actions you might get the results you want or you might get the results you need, and that's whatever percentage more journey picking you kind of thing. (20, p.5)

Finally, when participants were asked to define their own sense of spirituality, two thirds of them chose to include the connection to a higher power as an integral part of

their definition. Of course, different people chose different names or emphasized different aspects to describe the higher force they were referring to, including God, source of energy, higher being and cosmic consciousness; yet, they were all referring to a similar essence. Although the concept of a higher power was included in many of the participants' definitions, not many explicit references were made in the context of the ads. However, a few examples were detected. For instance, participant # 4 talks about the super-natural quality she finds in the BOA 60 seconds commercial:

The super-natural thing and the staring into the logo...because they look into this sign squared-diamond thing and they look at it and they realize it is just a square and then they look at it again and it's something else...it is kind of morphs which is definitely super natural interesting idea...It is definitely some kind of a metaphor of a staring into the future and learning about the future and having faith in something that's out there that's good for you. (4, p.4)

Also, participant # 19 describes how the BOA_60 seconds commercial mirrors her faith and conviction in God: "people see kind of this glamour of hope in BOA which is some kind of relates back to how Christians, if they struggle through things, they go to God and they find faith and they find hope and optimism through our faith." (19, p.2) After watching the LV commercial, participant # 22 talks about searching for a higher power while on a personal journey: "spoke to me on the personal journey, through realizing the higher power you also realize yourself, and like who you are and what you are doing on this planet, so for me that had a spiritual theme." She continues talking about her meditation experiences, after seeing a man meditating in the LV ad: "having the arms open, in the group meditation session we do something called KIRTA, which is like you sing a Mantra and you always keep your hands above your head...and I feel like, to me,

that's like you are surrendering, it is kind of like exulted, not submissive, but you are just there and you are trying to open yourself up to whatever influences are going to come to you." (22, p.4)

To summarize, the emerging spiritual concepts presented above should be implemented in future descriptions of the SAF framework.

The Use of Spiritual Terminology

One of the most interesting findings suggests that participants not only identified spiritual themes in commercials, but they chose spiritual terminology to describe them, even before the topic of spirituality has been brought up in the interview. Herein below are some examples of how participants used spiritual terminology in response to the ads.

The concepts of meditation and reflection repeated in a few of the responses, especially in relation to the LV commercial. Participant # 13 describes the reflection aspect in the LV commercial: "Kind of seems their commercial is supposed to reflect on things...like who you are... I think there is a girl looking in the mirror, like spacing out, just thinking, and it talked about like who you are and what kind of person are you creating yourself to be, just on this journey of life." (13, p.3) Participant # 20 continues: "it is a very calming commercial that shows a lot of scenes of nature, and people enjoying nature, and the simple things, and kind of reflecting." (20, p.1) Participants # 5 and #20 deepen the conversation and express some of their personal thoughts about self-reflection as a result of the viewing:

It's actually something I have thought about the majority of my life...whether I am making my own decisions, or whether I am falling with style ...I don't know

which one it is, but it's something that I look very critically, like the decisions I make and the way my life unfolds every day, and I take that and I meditate on the way my day ends and the way it begins, and I try to decide for myself whether or not like it was my own deciding, the way the day unfolded, or whether it was kind of me, just going with the wind. (5, p.5)

yeah, I guess we are just get caught up doing our day to day, and we have these ideas or dreams or accomplishments that we want to do, and if we don't stop and reflect and maybe take action to make them come true...I guess it is important to pose and reflect and to do some of these things that you always think you want to do. (20, p.3)

Many of the interviewees used a heavier tone to describe the ads. They included the words philosophical, deep, serious and even spiritual in relation to the ads. Participant # 14's reaction represents many of the responses:

you know it is just kind of like a deep message, like it has, you know, music playing that's kind of like more serious, I mean it's not that it's like light-hearted...I don't know, I feel it is a kind of thing, whereas if you were just watching it, you just maybe stop what you are doing and focus on it, and so I feel like for at least like while I was watching it or maybe a few seconds afterwards it is just kind of makes me think a little bit, maybe like, at least for a few minutes, like imagine taking a trip somewhere, like most spiritual India or somewhere just more exotic. (14, p.2)

Participant # 17 depicts the philosophical point of view of the LV commercial: "unexpected commercial because it's a minute and a half of philosophical enlightenment, and in the last few seconds you find out it's for a hand bag company, it's not your average handbag commercial, you could tell it is because there is models ...as far as the philosophical stand point it was interesting." (17, p.2) Participant # 11 chats about the seriousness of the message: "it was a very really, really serious type of commercial...I guess it was more like an inspiring type commercial, I guess it was part of it trying to

inspire you to think about the places you go, than more than just “I want to go here because it’s pretty,” see like it was trying to make you think on a deeper level on the places you go or vacations.” (11, p.3)

A few of the interviewees even used some explicit religious terminology. Participant # 19, for example, discusses religion and faith as a response to the BOA_60 seconds commercial: “it has a lot to do with having like a positive attitude towards things. If we are talking about like religion wise it is more like you try to look at the positive things, when things aren’t looking the way you expect it, you kind of bring the idea that there is faith in a more positive outcome in the future.” (19, p.2) Moreover, the LV commercial reminded participant # 11 the concept of missionary work. The text in the commercial, according to her, can go with a missionary trip: “I have heard people doing that kind of stuff...they say all this stuff about the journey changing people, I mean that makes me just think of people I know that do missionary type of work, so they have been to Africa, but it is not just a vacation that they are doing, so I know a guy who just got back from basically traveling all around the world...so those kind of things make me see their message maybe...ok, you are going there for a purpose, you are not just going there for a vacation.” (p.3, 11) Furthermore, “The Good Samaritan” and “The Golden Rule” were additional religious notions which surfaced from the data. These two ideas came as a response to the LM commercial. Respondent # 9 talks about the Golden Rule: “I didn’t really see that as responsibility but more as just like the Golden rule, because you treat others like you want to be treated...so it is just like inspiring people to be nice to each other, which I don’t really see as a responsibility.” (9, p.2) Participant # 19 brings to

discussion the Good Samaritan idea: “The Good Samaritan thing, being generous, being kind to people even that you don’t know, we are almost all like brothers and sisters in the world, it is kind of like we are always watching over each other.” (19, p.2)

To summarize, the use of spiritual terminology by participants demonstrates that spirituality was on their minds when they viewed and responded to the ads.

Explaining Spirituality in Specific Commercials

While the previous parts of the first section focused on broad examples which support the appearance of spirituality in advertising, this presentation revolves around the specifics of each commercial. Towards the end of the interview participants were asked explicitly whether they think spirituality exist in the commercials, and if so how. Each commercial triggered a different type of response; therefore, a brief summary of the findings for each of the ads is presented below.

It was unanimous among participants that the BOA_30 seconds commercial didn’t contain any spiritual themes. Participants were very definitive in their responses when describing the ad. For illustration, here are two representative responses: “it is very materially” (10, p.4); “relating to the concrete, kind of like the opposite of spirituality, like buying a house means success, but it’s only to some people.”(21, p.3)

Many of the participants identified spiritual themes in the LV commercial, and noted how obvious the spiritual undertones were, especially in comparison to the other ads: “The only advertising where I really see spirituality would be in the LV one. Like I think that’s kind of a strong message.” (14, p.4) Participant # 18 continues: “It was very

obvious in the LV because it doesn't talk about any objects they made at all, it talks about life being a journey...it's more about trying to articulate a philosophy." (18, p.4) Some participants even mentioned the role of executional elements, such as calming music, as contributors to the spiritual atmosphere of the commercial: "the rain, the simple background music, the models used in the ad were beautiful, not filled with sex, not anything else, but just a very... everything in the message was like very simple and true, and beautiful in like a earthy kind of way." (12, p.2) Participant # 18 adds: "that also has a similar calming effect from the music and from the scene that it shows." (18, p.3)

Participants provided four main reasons for why they see spirituality in the LV commercial. The first reason focused on the theme of the journey. Participants discuss how the concept of the journey and life being a journey is spiritual: "yeh, I think all the stuff leading up to about "personal journey," and "life is a journey," I think a lot of people associate that with spirituality." (16, p.4) And another example: "this is a spiritual theme too, life is all about the journey...some of the classes and fellowships that I had belonged to, they would always say that they were spiritual based, not religious-based, some of them were 12-step help group...you would hear that said a lot of times and that's why I said it's all about the journey." (24, p.5)

The second reason revolved around the notion of self-discovery, change and the meaning of life. Many interviewees claimed that these spiritual issues were present in the commercial, as stated by participant # 22: "spoke to me on the personal journey, through realizing the higher power you also realize yourself, and like who you are and what you are doing on this planet, so for me that had a spiritual theme." (22, p.4) Participant # 4

stresses the issue of self-discovery: “definitely when it comes to the LV ad the whole spirituality thing definitely makes sense because it definitely kind of compels you to think about that relationship between you and yourself, and where you are going in life and what your destiny is and like kind of mystical/spiritual sort of ideas that guide a lot of people.” (4, p.5) Participant # 14 adds:

it’s saying a journey isn’t a trip or a vacation because it’s higher than that, your own self-discovery, and that’s kind of a spiritual thing even just with yourself I guess, I guess when you start thinking about yourself, you might start thinking about your place in the world and the meaning of life, and then, I think that’s lead to all other spiritual questions. (14, p.4)

The third reason centers the theme of personal and direct experience. Participant # 23 describes the characters in the commercial and how they directly experience life and spirituality:

you can feel more of that deeper experience within them, they are experiencing something much deeper and spiritual because the commercial itself didn’t connect that happiness and that joy and that journey to a particular thing, like buying a house, or going scuba diving, or being a surgeon... it wasn’t so boxed in to: ‘happiness is this thing or this thing,’ it was much more ambiguous... to me that one had more spiritual themes in it because it was about that direct experience of life.(23, p.5)

Participant # 13 takes a different perspective and discusses the concept of creating yourself from a religious point of view: ”definitely something that easily turn to a conversation about spirituality and what it is that you create yourself, like for me, I am created and I am trying to be that kind of person that is led by the spirit.” (13, p.4)

Finally, participants described how the strong element of nature in the LV commercial connected them to their own sense of spirituality:

I relate to the solitude of being outside, for me that is kind of a spiritual place, as far as clearing your mind, and that's probably why it was my personal favorite, as far as meaning and message is concerned, because it did have a clear of thought theoretical meaning...it wasn't so straightforward, it left me something to think about later, and that's how... spirituality is working through things that you are not sure about. That combined with the whole being outdoors kind of theme, and exploring, is really similar to how I experience spirituality. (2, p.5-6).

Participant # 20 adds: "with the natural nature scenes and all that, I think that's one of the major ways that I connect with my spirituality, that is, being in nature, seeing the grandeur of nature and the workings of it...nature always kind of makes me connect to my inner deeper being, and that sense of connection with a higher being." (20, p.4-5)

The BOA_60 seconds commercial has also triggered responses from interviewees who saw spirituality in it. Some major concepts emerged from the data.

A few of the participants explained spirituality in the commercial due to the strong sense of hope, faith and optimism. Participant # 4 explains:

if you look into the logo and you see yourself in the future then there is some element of belief there... without even thinking about the BOA, it is kind of a larger idea of the faiths and destiny and you are connected and your actions can eventually lead you into something better, even if today is kind of gray and blurry looking, and yeah, that definitely to me has an element of spirituality, for sure... because a lot of people that I have read about have these tough times and their faith or their spirituality is what sustains them through it, and I think that commercial is definitely an embodiment of that, it makes a lot of sense. (4, p.5-6)

While bringing a religious angle, Participant # 19 elaborates on the same idea: "the positive look at things, in Christianity they always promote optimism, a positive attitude that God will provide for you and BOA kind of showed that idea of being able to provide,

being able to provide the people who saw emblem their dreams or their hopes of doing something.” (19, p.5)

The concept of seizing human potential or the fulfillment of dreams was a strong reference, among participants, to the spiritual element in the BOA_60 seconds commercial. For example, participant # 6 states the following: “It does exist, spirituality in that commercial exists, for me, the way I saw it, in that the people feel the bank is going to help them get to where they want to go, just that potential for that acquired experience is enough to validate spirituality element.” (6, p.4) Participant # 9 discusses how the BOA_60 seconds commercial fits his idea of spirituality and seizing one’s potential: “very much in line with it...I firmly believe that God gave us all potential and then for us to truly be happy is that we should live our lives to the fullest, work towards our dreams and aspirations, in line with his plan for us; so that one [BOA_60 seconds ad], yes, very much so because it talks about reaching your dreams...” (9, p.4) Interviewee # 5 explains the importance of investing in one’s future in relation to the ad: “it actually talked about the needs of people to invest in their own futures and look at the endless potential and the potentials that saving your money can actually bring you...it is not a commercial about saving your money just for spending sake, it is about investing in your future and investing in people.” (5, p.6) Along these lines, participant # 29 reminds herself of her personal dream to travel, as a response to watching the BOA_60 seconds ad:

when I think about future goals that staff that I have, one of the things that I really want to do next year is to go on something called “the world race”, for you like travel around the world for a year and it’s a mission trip and that’s kind of what I

thought like, “oh, I still really want to do that type of thing” so that’s a future goal of mine...and that goal is directly tied with my spirituality and my faith. (29, p.3)

A few executional elements in the commercial were also counted as contributors to the creation of a spiritual dimension in the ad. Various people mentioned the logo as a special creative feature that renders a unique feeling. In the commercial, the BOA logo is presented as transparent and bright colored feature, which visually expresses the dreams of the people in the ad. Participant # 4 names the feeling projected from the logo as super-natural: “The super-natural thing and the staring into the logo...because they look into this sign squared-diamond thing and they look at it and they realize it is just a square and then they look at it again and it’s something else...it is kind of morphs which is definitely super natural interesting idea...It is definitely some kind of a metaphor of a staring into the future and learning about the future and having faith in something that’s out there that’s good for you.” (4, p.4) Participant # 7 summarizes: “They used the logo like a crystal ball to the future.” (7, p.1) A different executional element in the ad which connects with spirituality was the calming effect of the music: “In the BOA_60 seconds commercial, I would say, mostly music was there spiritual, it wants it to emotionally connect with people, that music and the way the scenes are connected with one another, and that kind of an emotional connection requires some spirituality.” (18, p.4)

A few of the participants mentioned that the sense of community projected from the commercial reminded them of organized religion. Here are two of the responses:

I think that the sense of community that was going on. To me, church and other spiritual things, they bring a sense of community. I don’t know what’s going on, something that brings everyone together and they are looking at the sign...but that

is kind of a stretch...it is just people realizing that they are part of a larger thing, because whenever I think of it I don't think spirituality. (22, p.4)

Participant # 1 adds: "overlaps to spirituality but it is not explicitly all spiritual...But definitely I see some spiritual themes or feelings to it ...and more specifically [to the ad] almost a more organized religious style with it...religious like a community, of people and working together was kind of a theme to it." (1, p.5)

Many of the participants found the LM commercial more spiritual than the rest of the commercials in the study. A few explanations were provided by the interviewees. First, the idea of unconditional sharing as a strong spiritual idea was brought up by many of the participants as a major theme in the LM commercial. Members of all three groups tapped into that idea. Some took a more religious approach, as the next three quotes demonstrate: "in Judaism doing Mitzvoth, doing good deeds is a big deal, so I associate highly spiritual Jewish person with that being a central theme in their life" (16, p.4); "if you look at it there could be, because Jesus helped so many people and asked them to pay it forward, and like do to others what I would do to them, that's kind of other people seeing an act of kindness and going help someone else" (12, p.3); and participant # 19 concludes: "I felt like the ideas that it conveyed in there were more applicable to my religion, to Christianity, the values like again kindness, of loving thy neighbor, just being a person who has the capacity to defend the weak." (19, p.5) Others took a more straightforward, simplistic approach: "on the LM one I said something that I always say when I am talking about spirituality, is trying to do the next right thing, trying to help someone out, that is just a spiritual practice because it's selfless, it's a selfless act, like

you don't have to do that stuff at all, you are not going to get penalized for not doing it, and there is a chance you can get and put yourself in harm's way." (24, p.4) This point is also exemplified by the 'paying it forward' concept that so many participants referred to. Participant # 12 describes the concept: "I liked the way that it shows the chain of events, and people are paying it forward, helping out other people after seeing someone being helped, "oh, that's really nice, maybe I should attempt to do something for someone else in my life." (12, p.3)

Second, the idea of interconnectedness was mentioned by participants as prominent in the commercial. Interviewees discuss how this idea is connected to their own sense of spirituality: "we are almost all like brothers and sisters in the world; it is kind of like we are always watching over each other." (19, p.2) Participant # 10 describes how the idea of interconnectedness fits his own spirituality: "I can see that one kind of fitting my ideas of spirituality, in terms of just helping other people, my main idea of spirituality is like people centered, people are connected, so there is like a spirit between people, you help one person that kind of help everybody else." (10, p.4) Participant # 28 continues: "yes, I think spirituality wise; some people would think we are all linked to one another, we are all connected in the universe, we are all looking out for each other." (28, p.3) Participant # 27 summarizes that spiritual point of view:

In the LM commercial that was something that really connected to my spirituality, in the fact that we are all, our spiritual being, or so, is all connected. For instance, like the mood of someone you are sitting next to will affect your mood and that connection kind of is part of the kindness going around the world, and if there is kindness going around the world it will move through the spirit of one person to another, and if people are kind in spirit and kind in heart, then it will flow towards the people. (27, p.4)

SECOND SECTION: MAKING PERSONAL MEANING OF SPIRITUALLY-DENSE COMMERCIALS

The second research question focused on the personal meanings participants derive from spiritually-dense commercials. Findings indicate that different people make different meanings from the commercials; however, a few commonalities were detected and will be presented in this section.

The Human Factor

Interviewees suggested that the study's commercials were extremely relatable since they portray real people in real life situations. Elements such as real life issues and authentic facial expressions create a personal bond between the viewers and the characters in the commercials. This enables viewers to see themselves in the commercials and derive personal meaning out of it. Participants explain how the appearance of real people in authentic human situations makes it easier to relate to the ad and even to spirituality. Participant # 3 focuses on the emotional connection she experiences after watching the BOA_60 seconds commercial: "It touches you kind of emotionally, cause you see people's stories...you can relate because everybody has a story...it is kind of makes me want to know more people's stories..." "oh, what's their story". So when you kind of walk around you think about it a little bit. That is how it relates me personally." (3, p.2) Participant # 10 shares how the LM commercial fits his idea of spirituality: "I can see that one kind of fitting my ideas of spirituality, in terms of just helping other people, my main idea of spirituality is like people centered, people are connected, so there is like

a spirit between people, you help one person that kind of help everybody else.” (10, p.4)

Finally, participant # 22 celebrates people through the BOA_60 seconds commercial: “I thought it was good because it really appeals to like making people’s dreams come true, trying to imply that the bank is what makes them happen, it makes you feel good, like when you watch it, you are like: ye, go people.” (22, p.2)

A few of the participants were very content with the deeper and meaningful presentation of human beings in the commercials. Participant # 15 shares her personal feelings:

as a psychology student it’s spoke to me on that level, that level that everyone is different and everyone has something that they want and so the bank pinpoint at that very well; there is, people that just were walking down the street, kind of just going along in life, everyday, but there is always something more, there is always something deeper, and so I think it drew out that message really well, as opposed to what you just see on the surface vs. what’s in your head, like what you really want. (15, p.2)

She also discusses how important it is to reveal different and deeper layers of the human psyche, including spiritual layers, as shown in the BOA_60 seconds commercial:

the idea that things are going on beneath the surface, like all the people were just kind of going about their lives, walking down the sidewalk, but the idea that there is something bigger...I did like the idea that tapping into, that there is something going on underneath, that you don’t always see walking down the sidewalk. I felt that was important because a lot of people don’t or can’t or choose not to express their spirituality, and so that kind of parallel with that, the idea that there is something more that sometimes you just need a window or an outlet, or away to express it. (15, p.4)

The commercials also offered some comfort and encouragement to some of the interviewees when they focused on situations that are shared by all humans. By tackling

issues of the human condition, the ads brought viewers even closer to the content presented in them. Participant # 3 talks about this point precisely:

everyone...it seems like they were having a little bit of a hard time in the situation that they were [refers to the characters in the BOA_60 seconds commercial]; and anyone, I don't care who it is, will have a point in their life that they go through a hard time...and so you just think about it and you are like: 'well, that person has it,' 'I have it better than that person right now,' or 'I shouldn't think that I have it bad,' or even if you are in a bad situation, it is going to get better, and so, it is just kind of gives you that hope that they portray...even if you just have a bad day or something, and you can think about like: 'ok, it is ok, it is going to be better tomorrow', type of thing. (3, p.3)

Participants # 6 and #27 strengthens this point by showing how the BOA_60 seconds ad is an every man's commercial: "I have dreams like everyone else, so I can identify with that, we all have dreams, it is just who we choose to help us get there," (6, p.1) and participant # 27 continues: "A bank can help you fulfill your dreams, there are these things that everyone wants, and things like, it kind of covers all the basis with it: leisure, careers, home, family – all different kind of things, it can appeal to almost anyone in that sense because everyone wants those things...It was the every man's commercial" (27, p.1)

An effort was made in the commercials to keep the messages on a very basic human level, so everyone can relate to them. In that respect, participants mentioned the use of diversity and a diverse crowd of people in the ads to achieve that. Participant # 5 connects the dots between diversity, humanity and the effectiveness of the commercials (especially the LV ad):

the wide range of people that they portray in the commercial [the LV commercial]; there is a black individual, there is an old Chinese man, there is a woman- these are questions that everybody stands to kind of answer and that's a

question that everybody faces, it is a question that everybody has and I think that...it is that every man thing that I think that the two BOA commercials kind of drew upon...I think it is a pretty creative and also effective advertising like method...it is kind of shows that it's not a man style, it is not necessarily just a woman style, it can be for anybody because the style is applicable and accessible as the question of humanity and where we fit like in our minds. (5, p.4)

Participant # 6 continues about the BOA_60 seconds commercial: “there is a lot of diversity among the people...I can kind of take that as, the bank can take in any kind of group of persons: there were doctors in there, there were just people retiring, there were families, there were new families, there were new home owners, just a very wide range of people, and you know banks need that and BOA has that, they are appealing to a wide range of people with those instances in the commercial,” (6, p.2) and participant # 13 emphasizes how the use of diversity in the commercial makes it easier to relate: “yeah, I would definitely find it a little more relevant to me just because they had different people from different backgrounds and ages and everything, so there is like a random person in the streets of the city that could relate to me.” (13, p.2)

The Outdoor Setting

Nature played an important role connecting viewers with the commercials, especially the outdoors settings portrayed in the LV commercial. Participants explained the personal and spiritual connection they experienced with nature, and thus indirectly with the LV commercial: “I relate to the solitude of being outside; for me that is kind of a spiritual place, as far as clearing your mind and that's probably why it was my personal favorite as far as meaning and message is concerned because it did have a clear of thought theoretical meaning,” (2, p.5) and participant # 20 adds: “the things with

nature...I love nature and being outdoors and enjoying those kind of things, so I could really see myself enjoying those kind of settings, it is always for me like go back and forth, do I prefer to be in a more desolate beautiful place or the life of the city where there is pollution and all this and not so much natural beauty.” (20, p. 2)

The Experiences Presented in the Ads

Many of the participants described how the experiences presented in the commercials resonated with their own personal experiences. Numerous of the interviewees mentioned the idea of the journey as an important theme they can identify with. For example, participant # 1 describes how the idea of the journey speaks to her: “It was a very outdoorsy message, the traveling and the journey and the process of life and I liked that... I have kind of identified with it...I took a year off, between high school and college to do kind of journey work, finding myself, so I thought that was a nice message to have with it.” (1, p.2) Participant # 14 continues with her experience: “Yeah, like, I went to Sweden with my parents last year. On the one hand, I could say that it wasn’t the best trip because I was just with my parents traveling and sightseeing, it wasn’t like the kind of vacation maybe I would plan for myself, but at the end of the trip I felt like I learned just more about myself and like my parents,” (14, p.2) and participant # 23 elaborates on the message presented in the LV ad, while sharing from his own life:

a journey, it is just they are underlying that it’s something much deeper, it’s an experience, and it’s something that shapes you, you don’t necessarily shape it, which I can definitely relate to. I went traveling to South America this summer for two and a half months, I was just backpacking, at points I was sort of stressing out about like ‘oh, how am I going to get there, how am I going to get there, I want to see this,’ but at some point I just let all of that go and said: ‘I am just going to go

wherever like, wherever is right for me to go, that's where I will go,' it was sort of a step by step process of I would be at some place for a while and the next day decide 'oh, I am going to go somewhere else'...and it was totally an experience that shaped me. (23, p.3-4)

To some people, the experiences associated with certain occupations in the ads, elicited a personal response. For example, participant # 3 expresses how the BOA_60 seconds commercial reminded her of her own occupation as a photographer: "Now I am a photography major, and so when I take pictures of people, they kind like tell me a little bit of their story, like bits and pieces of who they are or what they do...and so when I see that [the commercial], I think about when I go out and take pictures, and like I will choose someone just because I want to know more about them, and they will tell some of their story; people want to tell their story, and so that's personally how it relates to me." (3, p.2-3) Others mentioned the little kid in the commercial who wanted to become a doctor as a reminder of their own personal aspirations: "the little kid who wanted to be a doctor...I am a pre-med, I want to be a doctor and that kind of resonated to me" (12, p.2); "when the little kid was looking through the BOA sign he sees the surgery room and like being a doctor, and definitely that's what I inspire to be." (19, p.1)

The ads also brought up some childhood memories. Participant # 16 shares her memories after watching the BOA_60 seconds commercial: "It reminded me of, sort of my great great parents who came from Russia through New York, so it sort of reminded me maybe of what their dreams were, when they came...I had empathy for the people in the commercial, so it resonated with me, I guess as someone who is a relative of someone who has been in that situation." (16, p.1-2) Participant # 24 also reveals his memories,

triggered by the LV commercial: “My dad has this quote, he always says about journey.”the journey of a thousand miles begins with a first step,” and I was just thinking kind of about that too, how, you can head towards anywhere, you just have to start doing it.” (24, p.4)

Life Junction

Participants claimed that the commercials presented situations whereas people are facing certain junctions in their lives. Viewers were able to relate since many of them are students and facing the same challenges portrayed in the commercials, as participant # 16 explains: “as a college student I have dreams and goals of hopefully my life will be like after graduation, so I think that is something that is always in the back of my mind.” (16, p.2) Participant # 20 wonders about her life junction as a result of watching the LV commercial:

yes, all the time, especially now we are kind of trying to decide where are we going to go, for my husband is finishing his doctorate, and then we are hopefully moving to Europe, but then this thing came up in California...and then how open do we need to be? And how much are we really choosing the journey? Or how much this random thing that came up from California? Do we need to just follow that, or really be proactive and say we want to be in this city, and then we will find a job there? Especially now, it's very salient to me...are we just choosing the journey? Or is the journey taking us along? (20, p.2)

Inspiring Ideas and Messages

Occasionally, participants were inspired by the commercials' messages and ideas. One of the most inspiring messages was attributed to the LM commercial, which presented the idea of sharing, as the next quote demonstrates: “After you watch it you just

feel good and you kind of want to go out and do something nice for someone else.” (9,

p.2) Participant # 27 expands on why he strongly believes in this message:

I try my hardest to really bring kindness into the world wherever I can, I think little gestures can mean a lot for a lot of people, there is like the idea that you should be nice to someone because you don't know what kind of a day that person had. There is a story, I don't know if it's true or not: there is a girl that was on her way, she was like planning on killing herself that day and she walks by, I think it was a security guy at her high school: “have a great day”, like he was very nice, “I hope everything is nice “and gives her a smile and says goodbye to her, and she ends up changing her mind because of this one thing. Like each piece of kindness can really mean a lot to the world and if this kindness isn't done, that's more absence of kindness and that spreads as well, it's like both of them kind of spread, apathy spreads just as much as the kindness spread, and probably even more, apathy is a lot easier to do. It's a good message because right now the world is definitely in need of a lot of that, it's pretty absent in a lot of places. (27, p.3)

Participant # 24 expresses how the idea of sharing matches his helpful personality:

Like I am the guy that will risk health to help someone out; like, I will pull someone out from a burning building. I always do that; sometimes I will do that unnecessarily. Like there is a fight downtown in the middle of the street, I'll run and break it up, I don't know the people they could have weapons, I don't even think about it, and my friends are always getting on to me about it. It is kind of an impulsive thing that I do, but I would totally have done any of those things; if I had seen an accident about to happen, I would help that person, so I can relate to it on that level for sure, but then again I am kind of watching for the pitch behind it. (24, p.2)

Finally, participant # 19 injected a religious meaning to the LM message:

yes, you are always talked about, you know on a weekly, on Sundays, and staff when you go to services, it's always talking about how we should learn to live virtuously and we should learn to love the people around us, and it also means being kind to other people, being open-hearted, and it is not just to family because we are all on earth together, and we all have to act as brothers and sisters, we were all created by one God. (19, p.3)

Another example for an inspiring message is brought by participant # 2, who watched the BOA_60 seconds commercial and said the following: “there is a lot of life to be lived...maybe I haven’t run Scuba diving before but there is still time in the future to do that, and that sort of things. I can still accomplish a lot, aside from just work.” (2, p.3)

THIRD SECTION: BRANDING AND ADVERTISING ISSUES RAISED BY PARTICIPANTS

The final section of the data interpretation discusses branding and advertising issues raised by participants, throughout the entire course of the interviews. Four major issues kept resurfacing and are presented below in the following order: attitudes towards advertising and branding; the influence of spiritual advertising; self and identity in relation to the brand; and product category.

Attitudes towards Advertising and Branding

Skepticism towards Advertising

A repetitive theme which emerged from the data indicates that many of the study’s participants do not trust advertising messages. Interviewees are very skeptical about the authenticity and the true meaning of the messages. Participant # 14 describes these suspicions very well:

it is a hard question, because you know in advertising they want to portray their brand as the best that it can be, so maybe this commercial is saying if you like join our bank then you will be successful or great or whatever, but you are not saying why your bank is like different or more special than other banks...I guess they are not saying what tools they are going to like help us accomplish, it’s like they are showing us what we want to accomplish but they are not saying how, they are just saying: “we are the bank of opportunity,” but it’s kind of like an empty promise. (14, p.3)

Participants were constantly trying to read between the lines and discover ulterior motives behind advertising messages. Here are three very common responses: “they want themselves to appear like a friend to each person that is coming into their bank and working on their behalf ...that’s their goal;” (4, p.4) participant # 7 continues: “I guess they are trying to build themselves up...they used to present their logo in its proper colors, but I guess what they are doing, they are taking their logo and turning it into a mirror, basically they are trying to make their brand more in touch with the American consumer;” (7, p.2) and finally participant # 21 brings the essence of the matter: “they hired a good advertising agency, I would probably like them even less because their commercial is so irrelevant to the brand and it just doesn’t say anything about their clothing or the quality...it seems they were just shooting this commercial to make you feel good and positive and then add their name at the end, so whenever you see their name in the future you have this positive feeling attached to it even though it is completely irrelevant.” (21, p.3)

Some of the responses showed a deep and basic distrust towards the institute of advertising. Inspired by a recent television show, participant # 27 said the following:

I feel like it’s just another machine of American, as far as advertising is like, I am thinking of *Mad Man* right now, all these advertising kind of creates these false idea of reality and puts it in people’s minds and I feel like it kind of participating in that by saying: “oh if you come to our bank than all these things are possible,” which is like the root of the false American dream, it’s like: “look. It’s all so great you can do this and this and this” and then people come and “oh well it’s not actually that great.” (27, p.2)

Although critical responses towards the world of advertising and commercialism were shared by members from all three groups, it was more common among the members

of the New Age group. Here are two typical responses from members who belong to the New Age group: “when I watch an ad I become kind of critical about the message, I mean, I don’t usually take it face valid, I don’t know how it affects me subconsciously; I wouldn’t go buy something,” (18, p.1) and she continues about advertising and commercialism: “No, it is superficial to me; I don’t think it applies to my world view in general.” (18, p.2) Participant # 22 explains how the practice of yoga and meditation has shaped her views about advertising and consumerism:

through yoga and meditation I have definitely figured out who I am as a person and that has made me be like more anti-consumerism and more anti television in general because I feel like it helps me see like what these things are doing to me, it helps me realize ‘oh they are trying to influence you, but you have to like know that it’s influencing you and decide if you want to let it influence you,’ so I think that through like self-awareness you are less susceptible to advertising. (22, p.5)

Authenticity

As a direct continuation of the skepticism towards advertising phenomenon, participants have also voiced the urgent need for authenticity in the field. The call for authenticity in advertising was a major underlying theme throughout the entire set of data; it kept emerging, although at times inexplicitly, when participants discussed various aspects of the interview. It was found that participants seek authenticity when they evaluate brands and advertising messages, as described earlier in this section. It seems that many demand truthfulness in the branding and messaging processes, as a vital key to establish any sort of relationship with a brand.

For example, some participants describe the messages of the commercials as good and positive; however, they complain about the credibility of the message and how it doesn't fit with the brand or the commercial setting. Here are some relevant examples from the data:

In history, with the huge waves of Americans migration into Alice Island, there were all these people coming, they see the Status of Liberty, "oh, all of our worries are gone, we find the American dream" and like they come here and they end up living in Slums and Tenements. They have more freedom, but it's the land of opportunity quote on quote, but it's hard to find that opportunity, and just because a bank says that you can with a picture and connecting that picture to the bank, it's a pretty idea and it's a good way to get people to associate their dreams with the bank, but at the same time it is kind of hard to believe that a bank is going to actually help that much. (27, p.2)

Participants # 18 and # 6 specifically indicated how the study's commercials do not demonstrate real-life processes; a fact which debilitates the commercials' credibility:

I think there is a good idea in it, but it is commercialized...I mean, you can write a book about it, it could be a philosophical book, but it could be, maybe like pop philosophy, so I wouldn't buy that kind of idea...also it is because a journey cannot be so smooth, it's like, I am having a journey, there are good parts, bad parts, but here it's very smooth, very aestheticized...I mean I don't find common sense in that way. (18, p.2)

Participant # 6 continues within the same lines when discussing the BOA_60 second commercial:

with this commercial and the views of the future of these people, it doesn't show any short fallings, it doesn't show any hinders that the people might have, it is just show them achieving their goals- there is no trials, there is no problems that anybody run into...you know, people have car accidents and they have to pay for things that slow them down...there is nothing like that in there, there is no down side to this commercial, so I think it is not fair in that respect. (6, p.2)

Moreover, harsher and surprising responses were received after participants saw the LV commercial. They explained how the message utterly clashes with the LV image, product and consumer's profile. Here are some of the surprising reactions:

It was a little surprising...I guess because I see LV as like this expensive thing, maybe only for a certain kind of person, and for them to think about, or going to the commercial where it talked about all sorts of people from all around the world, and all types of people, no matter who you are, just how you have been created and how LV is a part of that, that didn't make sense to me because I thought they were just like for a certain, stereotypically, maybe just high class kind of girl who wants to buy expensive things. (13, p.3-4)

I don't think that the commercial fits with the brand at all...when I picture LV I picture like kind of snobby...I guess because of the price of it or the people that I have met that have LV bags...have like a certain prestige that they feel they want to show to other people, and personally I am Target or backpack or whatever, and I don't see the need to spend that much on a purse...so I feel like the brand is something that people go for to show who they are and it kind of clashes with the commercial, just for me because it's like the commercial is saying just be who you are going to be...it shows people that are living so minimally, in other countries...and then the purse is so expensive...so it doesn't work for me, like with the brand. (3, p.5)

Participant # 11 continues: "it seem kind of ridiculous, especially since I know LV is pretty expensive purse...I just don't see people who would buy LV taking like hikes on mountains." (11, p.3) In conclusion, participant # 20 explains why the message and the brand don't go hand in hand: "there was a cognitive dissonance for me there, because like I said, life and the journey and all these deeper things, and then it's like buy this superficial bag ...the content doesn't really make me want to go and buy the purse. I mean, it makes me think about those things, but I wouldn't associate that with buying a purse." (20, p.2-3)

Finally, some participants go even further with the authenticity idea and expect these very positive, spiritual messages to be backed up with real-life positive actions:

I do associate them together [brand and message] but because of what they are effectively doing...like if LV were asking the same questions, and at the end they would put something like: “Darfur, saving Darfur,” then I would probably change my opinion a little bit more...it is the practical outcome of what happens by investing your time and money into these companies, this is what determines my answer, I want to see like what actually going to happen...As we saw, all three commercials were pretty thought-provoking and were pretty cool, but what actually happens. Anybody can put together a couple of million dollars and make a really cool looking commercial...anybody can make a message too, it’s really what’s happens at the end...we have these inputs but what’s the output exactly, I want to see what is going to happen. (5, p.6)

Participant # 6 expresses his frustration as well: “the brand tries to put an ideal out there and doesn’t have anything to back it up with.” (6, p.3)

The Influence of Spiritual Advertising

Although not all participants were influenced by the spiritually-dense commercials, various influences were reported and emerged from the data. Participants’ responses are presented in this part via the three traditional levels of influence: the cognitive level, the emotional level and the behavioral level.

The Cognitive Level

A few cognitive effects were reported by participants and are listed below.

Thought-provoking:

Participants describe the ads as thought-provoking. They testify that spiritually-dense commercials cause them to be more introspective. Here are a few examples: “yeah,

it would make me become very introspective for probably a few minutes...” (5, p.5); “it will make me think about it a little bit longer than I normally would have for a commercial or for a banking program or anything.” (12, p.2) Participant # 21 provides an example, from the LV commercial, of a specific idea that would make her ponder: “it’s asking a question, does a journey create you, or you create the journey? You could wonder about that, you know, just as far as moving to different places, and living in different places, just thinking about how you felt about that.” (21, p.3) Moreover, some respondents expressed how the ads made them think about their personal goals: “It kind of struck a chord with me, it made me think about my goals and moving to reach those goals, and different moves that I could make to reach those goals. It was something that definitely went through my head.” (27, p.2) Participant # 3 goes even further and describes how the BOA_60 seconds commercial created a transition of thought in her mind:

it is not just like, when you walk down the street before it was just like: ‘oh there is a bunch of people,’ and now you kind of like look at people’s faces, and it is not just like people anymore, walking around like ants, it is more like personal...you realize that each person has a story about them, and not just a whole bunch of crowded people going to work or something. (3, p.3)

Reinforcement:

Many of the respondents mentioned that the commercials didn’t change their minds about certain topics; however, acted as reminders to ideas they have already known. Participant # 3 clarifies this point: “you see this message around...in poems, in books, in songs...and it’s a good message.” (3, p.4) Participant # 1 continues: “The ad

almost supported things that I have already thought of. It didn't make me think of anything different or new or challenge anything that I have already thought of. It just was a similar message ...it was a message of something I kind of already felt and related to a brand.” (1, p.2) Participant # 6 discusses the benefits of having a reminder to a positive message:

the impact the message has on me would definitely be, every now and then I would probably think to myself what are my ultimate goals and what am I doing to get there, and this commercial would definitely remind me of this kind of things, because you don't get a lot of commercials or you don't get a lot of anything that says: “hey, are you still working towards your goals? Are you still striving to be the best or the most of whatever you want to be?” There are not a lot of commercials like that and this definitely had that theme in there. (6, p.1)

Educational effects:

A few of the interviewees discussed the positive teaching effects of the commercials. One of the effects was the motivation to learn about administrative staff: “at list it's gotten me start thinking that I do need to start consciously learning about these more mundane things in life that are really important, such as banking and financing, and you know having separate accounts for separate things...and starting up savings.” (5, p.2) Another effect was the learning of becoming a positive member of a community: “It definitely teaches you, not only does it promote their bank or their insurance company, it shows people how life should be, how we should act towards one another, and how as a community we should be caring enough to watch over people who even though we don't know, we still have to assume some responsibility for them.” (19, p.2)

Brand Effects:

Although the “skepticism towards advertising” section demonstrated some backlash effects of the spiritual commercials, this part shows how spirituality in advertising can also have some positive effects on brands.

Participants describe how spiritual messages in commercials positively changed their perceptions of the brands: “I won’t see the LV purses and bags in the same way I did 3 minutes ago now, because I saw the commercial...I used to think that the brand was kind of more peppy kind of girls that own the purses, but now it is up there with Armani.” (5, p.5) Participant # 13 goes on about the LV brand: “it was interesting...it seems like LV is really like almost philosophical, and like creating this person on this journey and like just around the world, and I would have just thought of LV as an expensive brand name so it kind of making me think of it a little bit different.” (13, p.3) Participant # 22 shares the shift in his perspective about the LV brand image as well: “Maybe a small effect, because I guess I was neglecting the fact that they have like travel and like luggage and stuff; it makes me think more of what they have to offer, maybe in a little way it takes it away from like LV only being cocktail parties, with girls with their little dogs.” (22, p.3) Furthermore, participant # 2 talks about the new affinity the LV brand achieved with nature: “For the brand it is good because it would bring me affinity to the brand because I would connect their brand with that moment of really beautiful nature scene. I don’t have to search for the connection.” (2, p.6) Finally, Participant # 13 expresses her surprise when she discovers a new perspective to the BOA brand: “helped look at BOA kind of a different way, I didn’t realize they were considering themselves as

bank of opportunity, so I thought that, that was really cool...they use the symbol to have other people look at it and see what they can become.” (13, p.2)

Others mentioned that the message will facilitate brand recognition: “it might help me remember the brand, but other than that probably not,” (16, p.3) while some noted that the spiritual message breaks through the clutter and is very noticeable:

I don't think they are looking for it, but I think if they saw a commercial which is more mystical and spiritual...more abstract and more out there, I think that would draw people's attention more than a commercial just like “you should come eat at McDonalds,” maybe a commercial like that [McDonalds] people would know what the products were more and so they would have more information, but as far as something would keep someone's interest, I think when it has that higher dimension to it, maybe it will make people focus on it more. (14, p.4-5)

The Emotional Level

The use of spirituality in commercials elicited different emotional responses among participants. Some reported a ‘feel good’ sensation in response to the LM ad: “it makes me feel good. I tend to believe that people are good nature, or more good nature than bad nature, so that commercial speaks to me more...” (7, p.2); participant # 9 continues: “After you watch it you just feel good and you kind of want to go out and do something nice for someone else.” (9, p.2) Also, the BOA_60 seconds commercial elicited the same nature of feelings: “so I think like the music, in conjunction with the images of people realizing their dreams in the commercial, definitely makes me feel good and it's like you are on your way to do something great, so yeah, it definitely got an emotional response from me, but my brain is telling me this is just a commercial.” (22, p.2)

Others reflect on national pride, hope and optimism, especially after watching the BOA_60 seconds commercial. Participant # 10 begins: “I think it is kind of American dream kind of message, so I think this is what they are really drawing on...feels privileged to live in this country, ” (10, p.2) then Participant # 17 adds: “they mentioned about BOA being the bank of opportunity, and how this is the land of opportunity, and that’s what America is all about, like the American dream, about succeeding, about getting out of tough times and so it’s clear the bank understands that that’s what on Americans minds, that’s what Americans dream about, idealize about.” (17, p.2) From that point, participant # 17 brings the discussion to hope and optimism:

It has an emotional impact. It sells optimism to people watching it, like they too could; anything is possible because this is the land of opportunity...so somebody watching it could be inspired, could feel hopeful, could feel optimistic...it makes you think of the future, it makes you feel optimistic...ye, it has a strong emotional appeal when I watch it. (17, p.2)

A few of the participants describe the calming and soothing effects of the spiritual commercials. For example, here is the description of participant # 18: “Romantic, more kind of has a soft wipe to it, it makes you feel relaxed, maybe take a bath or something like that, it is something about comfort and luxury; it evokes that kind of feelings,” (18, p.1) and participant # 20 adds: “it is a very calming commercial that shows a lot of scenes of nature, and people enjoying nature, and the simple things, and kind of reflecting.” (20, p.1)

Finally, these spiritual messages have also created some backlash or boomerang effects. The following account explains these feelings well:

they hired a good advertising agency, I would probably like them even less because their commercial is so irrelevant to the brand, and it just doesn't say anything about their clothing or the quality...it seems they were just shooting this commercial to make you feel good and positive and then add their name at the end, so whenever you see their name in the future you have this positive feeling attached to it, even though it is completely irrelevant. (21, p.3)

The Behavioral Level

A few behavioral intents emerged from the data. One of the most common ones was triggered by the LM commercial. Participants comment on how the ad encouraged and pushed them to help others. Participant # 8 explains: "sure. I guess it would push me...I am seeing people helping each other, I guess it gives me... feels like I should be doing it more, because if other people are doing it than I should be doing it. I also feel good about myself if I do it, so I think that it helps me push myself to help other people." (8, p.3) Participant # 9 continues with the same line of thought: "yes, this is something I can do... go out and just do random acts of kindness for other people... for a short-term I will definitely probably be more active on it, for a long-term probably just something that kind of by doing more, that kind of sink in more, and then hopefully will become more of a habitual thing." (9, p.2) He also gave an account of a step by step process of how the commercial will affect him:

so I watch the ad and it's like: "oh that was nice, people do nice things, I should do, I feel like doing that right now", so then I will go out, I will continue on with my life and then it will just kind of be in the back of my head, and then I might see something right on the elevator and think to myself: "hey, why not?" and then I will just maybe hold the elevator for someone, and then just try to find little things here and there where I can do nice thing for other people. (9, p.3)

Some participants even discussed the possibility of purchasing the products that were advertised. Here are some examples: "It is all about life being a journey and making LV

part of your life...and now I have to go buy a LV bag” (2, p.4); “I think if I needed a loan or a credit card, I would consider to go to BOA” (15, p.2); and finally, “if I didn’t know about the backgrounds of different banks and everything, and I would just look at that commercial, I would want to invest my money in that bank because the type of family, core values, the message that they send is very positive, so it kind of gives the idea that rather than the bank being some sort of cooperate business it is more like a family.” (19, p.2)

Inspired by the LV commercial, others expressed their motivation to travel: “it makes you want to go on a journey of self discovery or travel some and just try to have more experiences.” (14, p.1); “Makes me want to go travel because it shows all the possibilities.” (22, p.3) Participant # 11 shares her inspiration to vacation now in a different style and mindset: “I think it actually does influence because of the places they show and weren’t typical vacation spots, it kind of influences me to like if I were thinking about vacation in the future to go some place more unusual...and then maybe influence at for how can you experience more when you are on vacation or something.” (11, p.3)

Self and Identity in Relation to the Brand

The commercials triggered a discussion about self-identity and how it relates to the brands in the ads. The discussion turned to a few different directions. One of them implies at situations whereas the brand becomes part of the consumer’s life and identity.

Participants # 1 and # 2 exemplify this point by responding to the LV commercial which talks about personal identity and evolvement:

It gives that feeling of longevity, something that lasts and it's a piece of you and like learning about yourself...and in general the way I shop, I go with that's a kind of a LV thing for me, I buy LV, let's say, it would be a core piece that I would have for a long time...so I felt that is a theme throughout of it ...very ...not over done, not over the top, simplistic, long lasting and classic. (1, p.2)

And participant # 2 continues:

A luxury brand that becomes like a part of your life. They really made the connection between life being a journey and including LV in that journey...No matter where you are, if you had your bag with you, the bag is going to make the journey with you...you should take the luxury with you...I might not have a LV bag now, but maybe I will ...it will all grow...you will grow, whether you grow with LV or whether through the city or whatever. (2, p.5)

It is also important to note that brand image/identity could backlash, and as much as some consumers would like to merge with certain brand identities (as seen in the above examples), others wouldn't want to be associated with them, no matter what the message of the commercial is. For example, participant #20 opens up about the situation:

as far as the brand itself, it's very good, and good quality and they are nice looking purses, but I don't know if I would ever buy one, even if I had that kind of money, I might choose not to because just due to the concept. I would buy maybe another expensive purse that doesn't have the LV logo all over it...I wouldn't want to fit into that category, and I just don't like to buy things with brand on them, like advertise for them. (20, p.2)

Participant # 22 shares his point of view, and explains how his sense of identity clashes with the brand's identity, regardless of the ad's content:

it is all about being your own person and creating your own identity, and to me LV is a brand, and when you buy a product that everyone else is buying then you are not being yourself...because when I think about LV I feel like it's like an elite clique of people who have those things and not like a defined singular person

when you buy some of their products, a lot of their patterns are the same, so it's not like you have a big range to choose from of what your thing is going to look like, it's going to look a lot the same, I don't feel like it really is able to define an individual the way the text says it kind of make you. (22, p.3)

Criticism goes even further when participants expressed their concerns about bringing together a sensitive topic such as the self and combining it with a brand: "I also think it is a smart marketing tool because it is appealing to like a person's higher sense of self, it's more noble to have a LV purse now that it's about having a personal journey and like finding yourself with this product, but I think it's wrong, I mean I think it can work, I think it does work because it takes people's minds of just being consumers and being like people instead." (22, p.3)

A positive approach was adopted by some of the interviewees who claimed that having messages which highlight the positive side of the self could be very constructive to viewers. Participant # 8 shares his experience after watching the LM commercial: "sure. I guess it would push me...I am seeing people helping each other, I guess it gives me... feels like I should be doing it more, because if other people are doing it, than I should be doing it, I also feel good about myself if I do it, so I think that it helps me push myself to help other people." (8, p.3) Furthermore, participant # 26 describes the positive outcome of such commercials on the self: "I think it would be good, if you show commercials of other people, like people helping each other out and doing good acts. I think when people watch that, they would maybe take that in as part as their lives, rather than just seeing the ad as just for the business or item; take part of the message to their own life." (26, p.3)

Finally, the LM commercial raised an interesting point about the boundaries of the self in relation to others. Participant # 8 relates to that: “Responsibility, usually when I think about responsibility, it is responsibility for myself or looking after the things I have involvement in...the people in the ad have no connection with the people or very little connection with the people they are helping, so I feel it is more good will rather than responsibility.” (8, p.3)

Product Category

Product category emerged as a prominent construct in many of the interviewees’ responses. Mostly, it was brought up when participants complained about the lack of compatibility between message and brand, especially when spirituality is added to the mix. The discussion has evolved in two different directions: 1) compatibility between the spiritual message and the product or product category. Here, the discussion revolved around utilitarian issues concerning the physical qualities of the products, and whether or not they fit with a spiritual message; and 2) Compatibility between the spiritual message and the brand. At this point, participants deliberated whether the brand’s image or identity matches a spiritual message in commercials.

As stated before, some of the responses focused on the match between the message and the product. The data indicates that participants expect the magnitude of the product/product category to correspond with the magnitude of the spiritual message. Participant # 15 explains why, in that respect, a clash exists in the LV commercial:

I just didn’t really know how those ideas would connect themselves with the product, so like I would have expected it to be something like the bank

commercial or something, 'let us help you create your journey, or like at college or something' that was like a really big life decision kind of thing, whereas buying a purse to me is not a really big life decision kind of thing...so I guess that's kind of more what I would have expected, had I seen the first part of that commercial and not the brand, I would have expected something, some major transition, like a bank you need a loan to buy a house or college, you need to go to school, or travel to this country or something like that. (15, p.3)

Within the same lines, participant # 25 shares his doubts about connecting the LM product and the concept of spirituality: "I think there is a little kind of disconnect between the message and what the product is, insurance companies don't help people, that's a nice sentiment but it's not true...this commercial could have been wrong with almost anything...it could have been for a church... insurance company, I don't know." (25, p.3)

A few of the participants named alternative product categories that would fit better with the spiritual message presented in the LV commercial. Participant # 4 lays out her suggestion: "maybe a magazine or newspapers that will connect you to the outside world and help you understand better, and it was funny to me because all of these seem a lot more profound, in my opinion, than a handbag." (4, p.3) Participant # 6 continues: "the commercial, it just didn't go anywhere. It just defined what a journey was and then use that, trying to reference into what the product is, or the brand is, and I just felt there was no connection there, there is none, that's why I said earlier that it felt like a travel agency or could have been, because in there would have been a connection." (6, p.3) Participant # 14 has an additional offer: "Expected this commercial to be an advertising for like a place that people were going or a meditation center, but not a designer bag."

(14, p.2) Finally, participant # 16 offers her general opinion about product categories that would go hand in hand with a spiritual message:

hospitals, non-profit definitely, products that are really center on helping people improve their lives, but not necessarily ones that are known for money, maybe ones that are focused more on feeding people, or health oriented, something like that, maybe not as much like commercial products like Shampoo. I don't really know if a spiritual message will convince me to buy that Shampoo. (16, p.5)

Some participants did find a connection between the spiritual message and the product, especially in the LM commercial. Participant # 27 explains:

I would hope to think that they follow what they say, like with an insurance companies there is a level of kindness that has to be there, like when claims get submitted, those people have gone through something really tough, something big and hard in their life, like a house burning down or death of a loved one, things like that, and I think it's kind of good idea to make kindness part of the insurance game, like definitely. (27, p.3)

Other interviewees focused on the fit between the message and the brand's image, as was exemplified in the authenticity section. A couple examples which demonstrate this point are presented below. Participant # 22 describes a clash between the LV brand and spirituality: "I feel like it's wrong, I don't feel like any product could actually fulfill the spiritual themes that they are trying to portray, unless you are trying to sell a bible or meditation staff or yoga cloths maybe, things that are inherently attached to spiritual practice, but I mean like LV and spirituality doesn't, it like totally clashes, I don't think that, that would work." (22, p.5) Participant # 17 further emphasizes this matter: "I think it is an effective modern advertising if you do it right, if you do it like BOA did, where you tie it into your brand, its effective, but as far as how the LV did it, they had the

spirituality but it wasn't in line with like what I had expected with the company.” (17, p.4)

To summarize, since this study was a first attempt to discuss spiritual advertising with consumers, its findings hold implications for both practice and academia. In the following two chapters, findings are put in their adequate theoretical context, while both practical and academic implications are discussed. Also, suggestions for future research are presented.

Chapter 7: Discussion and Future Research

The main purpose of the current study was to further advance the knowledge and understanding in the emerging field of spirituality and advertising. As seen in chapter 6, the interpretation focused on three major areas of findings: the presence of spiritual themes in the commercials, the personal meaning participants derive from the commercials and some relevant advertising/branding issues. The following discussion is an attempt to elaborate on the findings in each of the three areas, while providing some theoretical anchors and suggestions for further research.

“SEEING” SPIRITUAL THEMES IN COMMERCIALS

Previous research of spiritually-dense commercials was based on the researchers' observations alone (see Marmor-Lavie and Stout 2009; Marmor-Lavie, Stout and Lee 2009). Therefore, one of the study's goals was to examine whether individuals perceive or see spiritual themes in spiritually-dense commercials. Findings suggest that participants indeed saw spiritual themes in the commercials. As emerges from the data, participants provided rich accounts that mesh with the previously presented SAF theoretical ideas. A few examples with some theoretical explanations are presented below:

Interviewees abundantly acknowledged the spiritual concept of sharing after watching the LM commercial. Inspired by the ad, they discussed the importance of sharing, the right terms and conditions of sharing and also the consequences of sharing,

similarly as it appears in the SAF core idea # 17. Participants also talked about the SAF idea of self-actualization and how the BOA_60 seconds commercial encourages people to pursue their dreams and goals. Moreover, an interesting finding showed that participants value the importance of direct experience and the action component in their own lives. Participants gave descriptions about how people should take the time and act upon things they want to achieve or experience in their journeys (see chapter 6). This finding augments previous research suggesting that our generation is seeking to experience life and spirituality first-handedly, while acting upon things in a proactive manner (see Jung 1933; Kamenetz 1994; Saucier and Skrzypinska 2006; Schmidt 2005). In addition, an interesting observation emerged from the data regarding how people perceive the concept of the self. When participants discussed the SAF concept of transformation, some mentioned the concept of fluidity and how we should avoid stagnation in our life. This view connects with the Buddhist perception of the self (Batchelor 1997), as well as some modern approaches to psychology (Leary and Tangney 2003); especially the concept of impermanency and the idea that the self is not a thing which exists unchanged through space and time. Participants also struggled with the boundaries of responsibility in relation to the self; how much are we really responsible for others and our community? This concept relates to previous literature that investigates the relations between self and others and whether these two concepts are distinct and separate, or interdependent (Leary 2004; Salzberg 1997). Finally, after watching the commercials, many of the participants also noticed the notion of the ripple effect, as it described in the unity of all mankind SAF core idea. In the ripple effect whatever happens to one human being affects the rest of us,

as a total sum (Solomon 2002); participants expressed this idea by suggesting that the LM commercial reminds them of the “pay it forward” movie. To summarize, it is evident that the study’s participants recognized many of the SAF theoretical ideas in the commercials. Therefore, the findings support and further validate the theoretical framework developed earlier in this dissertation.

Another interesting finding was the voluntary use of spiritual terminology by participants, which indicates that interviewees were thinking in spiritual terms while watching the commercials. When observing the rich descriptions provided in chapter 6, it is noticeable that participants borrow from two different worlds of terminologies: one tends to be more general and affiliated with the New Age movement, while the other relies on religion. For example, participants with a strong religious background incorporated in their descriptions religious terms such as: faith, missionary work, “The Good Samaritan” and “The Golden Rule.” Conversely, participants with a New Age background or with a more secular point of view used the following terms: meditation, reflection, philosophical enlightenment, deep and so on. These findings concur with studies that distinguished between various religious personalities and their different outlooks on life (see Allport 1976; Fromm 1967). To summarize this point, the use of spiritual terminology has further strengthened the assertion that participants do identify spiritual themes in ads.

Finally, participants elaborated on some of the specific spiritual elements they saw in the commercials. Once again, findings suggest that interviewees made the connection between spirituality and the ads’ messages. In each of the three spiritually-

dense commercials, participants identified major spiritual elements that resonated with them. In the LV commercial it was the focus on the journey of life, the meaning of life, the emphasis on direct experience and the centrality of nature that triggered spiritual reflection among interviewees. This is not surprising considering previous literature that found a strong connection between the following elements - being on a journey (Kamenetz 1994; Schmidt 2005), the search for meaning (Frankl 1984), the hunger for personal experience (Jung 1933; Saucier and Skrzypinska 2006) and the need to experience nature (Plaskitt 2004)- and spirituality. Additionally, The LM commercial set off other spiritual thoughts which include unconditional sharing, interconnectedness and kindness that should be paid forward – all are well known spiritual concepts (see Frankl 1984; Kale 2004; Solomon 2002). At last, the BOA_60 seconds commercial focused on other spiritual aspects according to the interviewees, among them the concepts of hope, faith, seizing human potential and a sense of community (see Cahn 2006; Emmons 2006; Fowler 1981; Maslow 1965; Seligman 1991).

Future Research Direction Related to the SAF Framework

In addition to supporting existing SAF ideas, results also provide supplemental core ideas that should be incorporated in future academic endeavors. Interviewees point at four additional main ideas. The first concept revolves around the notion of faith and hope. Participants mentioned that the message of hope was pivotal in the commercials and emphasized the need to always look at the bright side of life, even when things are extremely tough (see studies that support this spiritual notion: Eggers 2003; Koenig,

George and Titus 2004; Mytko and Knight 1999; Underwood and Teresi 2002). This is an important spiritual concept that is shared by many spiritual traditions and should be incorporated as an additional SAF core idea.

The second concept emphasizes how we should embrace life and live them to the fullest. This is one of the messages participants perceived from the ads –that is, life could take us to various directions and we should embrace them all, while having fun and experiencing it fully. The concept meshes with the flow theory of Csikszentmihalyi (1988) which describes people in peak moments of creativity and enjoyment. Since this concept represents another facet of the SAF core idea # 12 -live in the present- it should be added as an elaboration to it.

The third concept presents the topic of destiny vs. free will. Inspired by the commercials, interviewees deliberated about the extent to which we really have control over our lives; is life picking us, or do we pick our life? This spiritual/philosophical question has been investigated and centered many of the discussions across the disciplines (e.g. Davis 2004; Mole 2004; Perho 2001; Suzuki 2007), and thus a valid point that was raised by participants. In future research, it should be added as a new SAF core idea.

The fourth concept raised by participants was the connection to a Higher Power. Most of the participants included the Higher Power element – a fundamental concept in most spiritual traditions- in their definitions of spirituality; however, interviewees were not definitive about the presence of the Higher Power concept in the commercials. Future endeavors should pay careful attention to the Higher Power concept and whether it will

be implemented in future advertising messages. Certainly, implications are enormous to theory, practice and ethics.

Finally, further attention should be given to the different reactions the spiritual message ignited in two of the study's groups: the New Age group and the religious group. Both groups used different terminologies and semantics to describe the spiritual message in advertising. These results should be further investigated in the fields of communication and rhetoric. Furthermore, the findings inform marketing practitioners about consumer segmentation in relation to the use of spiritual messages in advertising.

MAKING PERSONAL MEANING OF SPIRITUALLY-DENSE COMMERCIALS

Data indicate that participants were able to personally connect with the spiritually-dense commercials. Four main reasons explained why this is so.

The Human Factor

Participants repeatedly claimed that the commercials presented a very relatable profile of people and situations. Interviewees emphasized various executional techniques that amplified the connection with the message, including facial expressions, music and colors. This phenomenon which describes the connection between viewers and the personas on the screen is well explained in the field of media effects, through the Para-social theory. The theory discusses the power of Para-social relationships (pseudo-personal relationship) between media users and mass media performers (Horton and Wohl 1956). It explains that the unique characteristics of the electronic media, especially those of television, have ignited an illusional sense of intimacy between media users and

performers on the screen. Intimacy and authenticity are achieved via media techniques such as close-up shots and camera zooms (Horton and Wohl 1956), as was confirmed by this study's participants as well. Thus, it is not surprising why subjects found these techniques effective and the advertising messages relatable.

Many participants perceive the idea of spirituality as people centered; thus, the preoccupation with humans in the commercials provided a convenient ground for viewers to connect advertising messages with spirituality. This approach coincides with humanistic traditions to spirituality, among them positive psychology (Csikszentmihalyi 1988; Emmons 2006; Maslow 1965), which emphasizes the human spirit and the aspiration for highest human potential. Participants described the commercials as an every man's commercials; a fact which enabled them to connect with the messages in general and with spirituality in particular. They name a few reasons of why this is so. First, the ads appeal to various levels of common human desires and dreams (see Maslow 1965 and his hierarchy of needs), including having a home, economic stability, education, career, family, spiritual balance and leisure. These basic needs can appeal to almost anyone and thus are very relatable as suggested by the interviewees. Second, many aspects of the ads dealt with being human and the enigma of the human condition. Specifically, that included some existential questions about the meaning of life, conditions of hardships, coping strategies and issues of human transformation. These contents are inherently bonded with spirituality and spiritual concepts (see Frankl 1984; Solomon 2002; Zohar and Marshall 2001); accordingly, no wonder participants made the connection to spirituality when they identified those themes in the ads. Finally,

participants mentioned how relatable the commercials were due to their sense of diversity. Interviewees' accounts detail how diversified human presentations were in the ads. Ads appealed to different ages, gender and races, and thus participants claimed they could always find a character that would speak to them on a personal level. The very inclusive message portrayed in the ads also resonates with the SAF spiritual idea of unity of all mankind (see previous chapters and also Kale 2004).

Data suggest that spiritually-dense commercials are often perceived by participants as a new and refreshing representation of advertising (see chapter 6). Traditionally and over the years, the world of advertising has suffered a great deal of criticism, including from the participants of the current study (see chapter 6). Classic advertising critics argue that advertising has the power to affect our society and to distance ourselves from a true spiritual journey (e.g. Pollay 1986; Potter 1954). They add that the nature of advertising dictates shallowness, short-term attitude and rapidity; therefore, there is no possible way to gap between materialistic values conveyed in ads (e.g. individualism, egotism, separation, materialism and immediate satisfaction of needs) and spiritual values (e.g. sharing, interconnectedness and self growth) (Pollay 1986; Pettit and Zakon 1962; Potter 1954; Einstein 2008). Conversely, several of the participants of the current study shared a different impression and discussed the new positive directions the spiritually-dense commercials seem to be taking. First, participants were content about the deeper and much more meaningful presentation of humans in the commercials (see descriptions of participant # 15 in chapter 6). Subjects attested that the messages went beneath the surface, made an effort to look closely and deeply at each individual's

self and story. Second, an emphasis was put on the positive aspects of life and the celebratory part of it, as described by participants. Third, the commercials opened up a safe window of expression for people. For example, many participants were attracted to the unique presentation of the logo in the BOA_60 seconds ad, and viewed it as some kind of a channel that encourages people to express themselves (see chapter 6). Finally, the presentation of common human situations in the commercials reminded participants that all of us go through similar experiences and hardships in our lives. To summarize this point, participants confirmed that the approach of spiritually-dense commercials is indeed different; it actually offers an opportunity to correct long-term damages of advertising in our society. The above new advertising directions, as were detected by participants, can actually contribute to a healthier sense of self. By adopting advertising messages which embrace deeper perspectives of individuals (Zohar and Marshall 2001), the idea of self-compassion (Neff 2003) and commonalities shared by all humans (Leary 2004), we are moving towards the right direction.

In conclusion, it seems that the human factor played a major role in participants' ability to connect with the commercials. Moreover, this connection helped participants make the leap to spirituality. Also, there is a great possibility that the various characteristics of the spiritually-dense commercials could signify a change in advertising perspective and thus should be examined in the future.

The Outdoor Setting

Participants were inspired by the nature scenes presented in the ads. They elaborated on their connection with nature and how nature plays a significant role in their own individual spirituality. For example, participant # 2 said the following: “I relate to the solitude of being outside, for me that is kind of a spiritual place, as far as clearing your mind.”

The link between nature and spirituality is intrinsic and has been documented in many spiritual traditions. Various traditions refer to spirituality as a journey; obviously, the physical aspects of it involve the interaction with nature (Kamenetz 1994), the experience of solitude in nature (Schmidt 2005) and the lessons you learn from just being in the outdoors (Lew 2005). Moreover, nature is used for the purposes of meditation and the regaining of spiritual strength (Kamenetz 1994; Lew 2005; Neal 2000; Schmidt 2005). Finally, previous research reports that people desire the closeness of nature, as part of their well-being (Plaskitt 2004). Accordingly and considering previous evidence, it is not surprising that participants related to nature in the ads and even made the association to spirituality.

The Experiences Presented in the Ads

Participants better connected with the ads when the messages reflected situations that were personally experienced by them. For example, several interviewees reported that the commercials brought back old experiences of traveling and being on a journey. The students described trips to South America, Sweden or a year off in the outdoors.

Moreover, the traveling situations presented in the commercials triggered some emotional and spiritual journey experiences that will be remembered for a life time. Another example which elicited a personal connection between participants and the messages was the presentation of certain occupations in the ads. When participants had or wished to have an experience with a certain occupation presented in the ads, it received a better response from them (e.g. the child in the BOA_60 seconds commercial who wanted to become a doctor). Another example involves childhood memories. It appears that a personal connection with the ads was achieved when the commercials managed to bring back childhood memories among participants. One final example demonstrates that every time when the characters in the commercials have reached a life junction point, it resonated with most of the participants who responsively shared their own deliberations. One of the most common topics of deliberation was ‘the life after graduation.’

Looking at these findings, along with past persuasive communication literature, it is obvious that certain key advertising constructs played a role in here. Previous research suggests that involvement is an important construct in advertising message processing; the more involved consumers are with the advertising message, the better they respond to it (Krugman 1956; Petty and Cacioppo 1981). As noted earlier, participants were personally involved with various aspects of the message and thus the results find support in the theory. Moreover, the personal connection participants established with the message could also be explained by their emotional response (e.g., childhood memories) to the ads. Scholars have discussed in the past the effectiveness of emotional processing and the role that it plays in the context of advertising (Holbrook and Batra 1987;

Vakratsas and Ambler 1999; Zajonc 1980). Finally, the combination between cognition and emotion could have also occurred while participants processed the information in the ads; various theoretical models have pointed at these processes (Meyers- Levy and Malaviya 1999; Petty and Cacioppo 1981; Vakratsas and Ambler 1999).

Inspiring Ideas and Messages

It is apparent that some of the participants were very inspired by the advertising messages presented in the current study (see chapter 6). According to participants' portrayals, these messages were followed by: a) an emotional response, and b) a motivational/behavioral response. The LM commercial has received the most eager responses. Subjects were impressed by the positive appeal of the message and attested that it made them feel good, inspired, introspective about spiritual and worldly issues and eventually motivated them to help others (see chapter 6).

Previous research can explain the reactions of these participants. First, the feeling good sensation or the creation of a positive mood, as a result of advertising stimuli, is a well known marketing technique that enhances brand attitudes and decreases cognitive elaboration (Batra and Stayman 1990; Edell and Burke 1987; Erevelles 1998). It seems that advertisers create a special atmosphere to encourage favorable attitudes towards the brand. Second, it was found in the literature that emotional responses towards the ad affected behavioral responses as well. Specifically, commercials that evoked feelings tended to attract a more favorable behavior towards the ad than "factual" commercials (Olney et al. 1991). As reported in the current study, it seems that the emotional

responses of participants have led to favorable attitudes towards the ads, and then to behavioral motivation - in the case of the LM commercial to help others (see the process of thought participant # 27 brings in chapter 6). Finally, from the participants' descriptions it seems that other factors also played a role in the formation of the attitudes towards the ads. For example, participant # 24 talks about his helpful personality and how it resonated with the LM message. Also, participants # 27 and # 19 shared their general philosophical and spiritual attitudes and described how they fit with the LM message. These findings go along with the study of Vakratsas and Ambler (1999) which discusses the importance of various personal filters that consumers use in the process of advertising consumption.

Future Research Direction Related to the Meaning of Spiritually-Dense Commercials

The current study clarified some of the message characteristics of the spiritually-dense commercials. It was noticed that the presence of nature, a strong human factor and inspiring ideas in the commercials, were the characteristics which contributed the most to the relatedness of the ad and its connection to spirituality. Future research should further explore additional characteristics of spiritually-dense commercials and examine whether they resonate with consumers. Besides the content elements of spiritually-dense commercials, future endeavors should also explore the contribution of executional elements to the creation of a sense of spirituality in the ads. Participants have already

mentioned the elements of calming music and some camera techniques as important factors.

Moreover, some implications of information processing emerged from the data. Future research might engage experimental methods to investigate the various stages of information processing of consumers, when spiritually-dense commercials are involved.

The data points at a new direction the world of advertising might be taking, due to the phenomenon of spiritually-dense commercials. Future studies should look further into that and investigate various routes of research, including, interviewing advertising professionals, interviewing different types of consumers and analyzing more ads.

BRANDING AND ADVERTISING ISSUES RAISED BY PARTICIPANTS

Data reveals that participants have raised a few advertising and branding issues throughout the current study. The section below presents and discusses the main findings.

Attitudes towards Advertising and Branding

Skepticism towards Advertising

As indicated in chapter 6, many of the participants demonstrated persuasion knowledge about advertising attempts and tactics. Throughout chapter 6, interviewees discussed the intention behind advertising messages, what they are directed to do, who is the target audience? And how does the psychological mechanism of consumers work? This phenomenon of consumers' persuasion knowledge has been investigated in the past and received support in the literature (Friestad and Wright 1994; Wright 1985). Friestad

and Wright (1994) even deepened their exploration and developed the Persuasion Knowledge Model (PKM) which explains the circumstances and mechanism of this phenomenon. According to the model, people learn about persuasion from various sources and social agents, including friends, family, education, conversations and commentary on advertising in the news media. Moreover, it seems that persuasion knowledge is also contingent upon generational and historical development, as well as the individual development over time (Friestad and Wright 1994). These theoretical explanations coincide with the characteristics of the current study's population. All of the participants are students who were exposed to previous persuasion education in school, via conversations with friends or from the media. Furthermore and historically, the participants belong to a generation which is constantly exposed to media and technology and thus to persuasion techniques. Jung (1933) describes the modern man as someone who searches deeply and receives insights from the psyche. Linzer (1996) adds that the modern person is not satisfied with the givens of life. Therefore, it is highly logical that participants will look further into the media messages and not accept them as given.

With the expression of persuasion knowledge also came skepticism. Participants constantly voiced frustration and skepticism towards the persuasion efforts made by advertisers and brand managers. Consumers' distrust of marketing and advertising practices is not new in the literature. Forehand and Grier (2003) developed a typology of two kinds of consumers' skepticism: dispositional skepticism and situational skepticism. While the former describes a more general objection and suspicion towards the world of advertising, the latter refers to a temporary state of doubt towards a specific

advertising or marketing attempt. Participants in the current study expressed both: some directed skepticism towards a specific situation (for example, the message of “the journey” doesn’t fit with a brand that sells handbags) and others directed skepticism towards the world of advertising in general (e.g. participants talked about the American Advertising machine or the false promises advertising is trying to sell consumers).

Although findings suggest that predispositional skepticism was a common thread among the three groups of participants, it was more prominent among the members of the New Age group. Since previous studies associated predispositional skepticism with a personality trait (Obermiller, Spangenberg and MacLachlan 2005) it would be interesting to ponder about the general characteristics of the New Age group. Fromm (1967) and Allport (1976) discuss the characteristics of people who adopt the principles of mature religion; these are people who tend to be deep, experimental, express a need for direct experience and reject dogma or institutionalized authority. Descriptions of participants who are skeptic about consumerism and also belong to the New Age group are aligned with these traits. The words of participant # 22 are brought here again to demonstrate this point:

through yoga and meditation I have definitely figured out who I am as a person and that has made me be like more anti-consumerism and more anti television in general because I feel like it helps me see what these things are doing to me, it helps me realize ‘oh they are trying to influence you, but you have to like know that it’s influencing you and decide if you want to let it influence you,’ so I think that through self-awareness you are less susceptible to advertising. (22, p.5)

Authenticity

Authenticity emerged as a strong theme throughout the data. It appears that participants have placed authenticity as a tool to evaluate advertising messages and brands. Criticism focused on a few different directions: 1) message – brand fit, 2) message-consumer profile fit, 3) message-product fit, and 4) the authenticity of the message in relation to the input or the action component at the end of the commercial. For example, participants complained that the magnitude of the LV product - a handbag- doesn't match the magnitude of the deep and spiritual message of the LV ad. Moreover, interviewees found a dissonance between the LV message, which is very inclusive and welcoming, and the perceived profile of the LV consumer who is very snobbish and exclusive. In addition, subjects mentioned, at times, that the commercials presented unreliable situations. Participants claim that in real life, when a person experience a journey or a process, it takes time and also involves ups and downs; therefore, presenting too much of a smooth experience is less reliable. Finally, several participants wanted to observe how these spiritual messages are backed up in reality; in other words, subjects wanted to see actions behind the spiritual preaching of the commercials.

“The search for authentic experiences pervades contemporary culture. Whether it be through the performance of risky activities, traveling to historic places or just a return to natural practices as consuming organic food, our age shows strong signs of a drive toward the experience of the real.” (Thury Cornejo 2008, p.5) Past consumer research augments this claim and the above findings as well: “what people are looking for is products that are authentic, real and true, possibly hand-made or so they can tell the

origin.” (Plaskitt 2004, p.4) Wolfe (1998) discusses the prominent values amid adults today, among them simplicity and authenticity, which are already incorporated in current advertising messages (Marketing 2004).

The constant attempts of persuasion in the modern world have pushed people to highly guard what is real for them (Boyle 2004). Peter Berger (1973) explains the meaning and the urge for authenticity in our culture, through the relationship between self and society. He claims that in the past, institutions reflected a real identity which was mirrored in the individuals of our society. Therefore, people experienced a world that was fully real and defined for them, with less of a need to search for identity and authenticity. Conversely, today, modern institutions represent constant change and lack of stability which is also reflected in the self of individuals in the present time. Hence, from the individual perspective s/he is searching more for something authentic and stable to hold on to in our society. The distrust participants in the current study have expressed towards the institution of advertising matches Berger’s assumptions. The demand for authenticity from advertising practices can be explained in Berger’s terms, that is, participants would like to see an authentic reflection of themselves via the institutions of society, in this case the institution of advertising.

The Influence of Spiritual Advertising

The Cognitive Level

Traditionally, the cognitive response model, which suggests that: “persuasion is a function of people’s reflections on and cognitive responses about the content of a

message” (Meyers-Levy and Malaviya 1999, p. 47), has ruled the persuasion literature, including in the context of advertising. The current study detected a few influences of the advertising message, attributed to the realm of cognition. Interviewees referred to effects in the level of reinforcement of existing attitudes and the level of conversion of old perspectives. For example, several participants mentioned that the advertising messages were a positive reminder of how to approach life. Others even mentioned how the spiritual commercials made them view people and brands differently. Klapper (1960) has framed the effects of conversion and reinforcement as possible reactions to the exposure of mass media contents.

Participants mentioned that the spiritual messages triggered thoughts about their past experiences, views about certain assertions in the commercials and even motivated them to think about their personal goals. Macinnis and Jaworski (1989) classify such responses as cognitive responses to advertising. They name a few possible responses that match with the above findings, among them: “evaluative and nonevaluative thoughts about salient ad cues;...message-irrelevant elaborations/memories triggered by salient cues; ...and interpretive inferences.” (Macinnis and Jaworski 1989, p.9)

Other findings point at some educational effects that have occurred. Participants report that they have learned a few steps towards a secured financial future; as well as about some social and communal skills. Social Cognitive Theory suggests that individuals can learn through observational learning, including from mass media contents (Bandura 2002). Previous research acknowledged advertising as a way to promote

incremental learning and thereby increase efficacy associated with product, category or brand (Bandura 1977).

Some participants discussed the benefits of the spiritual message to marketers. They emphasized how unique the message was and thus effective with brand recognition and attention drawing. Goodman and Dretzin (2004) addressed the issue of breaking through the marketing clutter, in their movie, *the persuaders*. They explained how difficult it is to draw the attention of the average consumer who is bombarded daily with persuasive messages. Previous research discussed different methods which effects brand recognition, for example music (Stewart, Farmer and Stannard 2004); therefore, these findings, concerning the spiritual message, offer some practical ramifications to the fields of advertising and marketing.

Finally, data indicate that several participants have experienced a positive attitude shift towards the brands. The study of attitude change in response to advertising messages has been documented and received a great deal of attention in the literature (Brown and Stayman 1992; Vakratsas and Ambler 1999), and thus these findings are not surprising. Researchers examined theories of attitude change and implemented it to the field of advertising (see theories of attitude change: Hovland, Janis and Kelley 1953; Heider 1958; Festinger 1951). Once again implications for advertising practice should be further examined.

The Emotional Level

The spiritual message elicited various emotional responses among participants. As explained earlier, interviewees attested how the commercials managed to create a ‘feel good’ sensation, due to the positive portrayal of humans in the ads. Interviewees were encouraged by the commercials; reaching to the conclusion that human nature is pleasant after all. These findings align with previous marketing research which describes various techniques to encourage a ‘feel good’ sensation among consumers (Batra and Stayman 1990; Edell and Burke 1987; Erevelles 1998; Olney et al. 1991).

Moreover, other interesting effects were detected; it appears that the spiritual commercials have managed to elicit calming and soothing effects among several of the participants. Subjects also provided some explanations; they claim that executional elements in the commercials, mainly beautiful nature sceneries and music, have contributed the most to the soothing effects of the commercials. Past research has linked the influences of music and other executional elements to subjective responses of consumers, including emotional responses (Alpert, Alpert and Maltz 2005; Scott 1990; Scott 1994).

The spiritual advertising stimuli triggered some positive as well as negative emotional responses. Among the positive emotional responses, participants mentioned the feelings of hope, national pride and optimism. Research shows that when positive emotions, such as optimism, pride and hope, are present in persuasive campaigns, they tend to have a positive effect on consumers or voters (Seligman 1991). In political campaigns, emotions of national pride are particularly prominent since they are used to

create solidarity among the people, enthusiasm and motivation to vote (Diamond and Bates 1984; Marcus and Mackuen 1993; Pratkanis and Turner 1996); this knowledge matches the findings of the current study whereas participants described the hopeful messages as inspirational and motivational.

Some of the emotional responses that were depicted by participants were negative, and could be classified as a backlash or a boomerang effect to the spiritual message. Participants were bothered by the commercials' positive persuasion attempts and mentioned that the message was irrelevant to the brand or the product being advertised. Previous studies addressed the boomerang phenomenon in persuasive communication. The Elaboration Likelihood Model states that in cases when the persuasive message is ambiguous and doesn't align with the attitudes of the receiver, then a boomerang effect is likely to occur in the elaboration process (Petty and Cacioppo 1986). Furthermore, studies also showed how the overuse of positive appeals can create a boomerang effect among consumers (Mann and Hill 1984). This could explain the backlash or boomerang effect participants experienced with the spiritual message.

The Behavioral Level

Theory suggests that among other things, consumer behavior is a result of both cognitive and emotional responses to advertising stimuli (e.g. MacInnis and Jaworski 1989; Vakratsas and Ambler 1999). The description of participant # 9 reinforces this assertion (see chapter 6). He details the elaboration process that occurred in his head, following the exposure to the advertising stimulus – in this case the LM commercial:

first, thoughts about good deeds occurred; then, favorable feelings about doing similar acts of kindness appeared; next, these thoughts and feelings are stored in the back of the mind; and finally, when life brings about a similar situation to the one described in the ad, this is the cue to act upon it. The stages depicted in the above portrayal have been documented throughout the evolution of the study of persuasive communication in advertising (Fazio 1986; Lavidge and Steiner, 1961; Vakratsas and Ambler 1999; Zajonc 1980).

From the data emerges that the spiritual message has ignited, in some cases, the desire to engage in pro-social behavior. People reported that they liked the advertising message so much that it inspired them to act in the same social manner in real life. A growing tradition in the marketing literature focuses on social marketing and explores ways to positively affect consumers. Considering the above findings which demonstrate how the spiritual message positively affects consumers; there are some new implications to consider in the realm of cause-related marketing (e.g. Berger, Cunningham and Drumwright 2006; Drumwright 1996). Besides positive social effects, data reveals that the spiritual message has also affected participants' aspirations for personal growth. Interviewees talk about the desire to travel and to embark on a personal journey in a different and mindful way, then what they were taught in the past. Except the obvious ramifications to the realms of advertising and communications, these findings could offer practical implications to the fields of social psychology and education (see literature about mindfulness and psychology: Langan 2006; Martin 1997)

Some participants have experienced a greater behavioral effect and even expressed their intention to purchase the products or services that were advertised in the commercials. Reported purchase intentions seemed to be directly connected with the spiritual advertising message. Subjects mentioned how the values and contents portrayed in the ads projected on the brands, and thus created a desire to purchase. It seems that the congruency between participants' values and the spiritual message has increased the likability of the ad, and so the likability of purchase. Although not discussing behavior directly, Petty and Cacioppo (1986) relate message likability with the attitudes of the receivers; in cases when the message is in line with the receiver's (or consumer's) attitudes then persuasion is likely to occur. In general, studies show that consumer behavior is complex and is the result of many factors collided together, including economical factors, emotional, cognitive and environmental (Vakratsas and Ambler 1999).

Self and Identity in Relation to the Brand

People's identities are heavily influenced by the culture and social environment they grew up in and currently live in (Singleis and Brown 1995). Identity formation is shaped through social interactions. The socialization process embodies many meanings which contribute to the development of the individual self (Richins 1994). Furthermore, one school of thought claims that people construct their identities through the use of and the relationship they build with objects (e.g. Kleine, Kleine and Kernan 1993). In that sense, research showed that people use brands for the same purposes; that is, to express

and construct their identities (Muniz and O'Guinn 2001). As the current study shows, participants gave descriptions that match with the above assumption. For example, subjects were using the following phrases, while referring to the LV brand: "it's a piece of you," "a part of your life," "learning about yourself," "you grow with LV," or "the bag is going to make the journey with you." However, while one segment of participants wanted to be affiliated with the brand (the LV brand), another segment wanted to distance itself from it and what it symbolizes. From the data appears that the people, who welcomed the LV brand into their identity, didn't hold any particular objections towards the practice of advertising and were open to the idea of the spiritual message combined with the brand. Conversely, the people who didn't want to be affiliated with the LV brand seemed to be more skeptical towards the world of advertising, didn't want to advertise or fit with any brand, thought that the brand represented a "cookie cutter approach" and perceived the use of spiritual message together with the LV brand as a dangerous marketing tool. In general, this group of people was often associated with the New Age group of the current study. These findings go along with research that explains how consumers use brands for different social purposes: on the one hand, to prove and to establish a certain group affiliation; and, on the other hand, to distinct themselves from certain groups or social affiliations (Belk 1988; Muniz and O'Guinn 2001). Various brands hold specific social and cultural meanings; therefore, by using or identifying with a certain brand, the meanings transfer to the identity of the consumers (Belk 1988). Specifically, the reported findings suggest useful and practical implications to the fields of advertising and marketing. First, findings offer suggestions in the area of audience

segmentation. The results explain how the identity of certain brands meshes with the profiles of certain people, when spiritual message is used in advertising. Second, findings teach how to reach the new age segment. Building a message and a brand around the ideas of originality and unique individuality potentially can attract this group of people.

Furthermore, the data suggest that the spiritual message plays a role in constructing a positive sense of self. Participants report that the positive messages encouraged them to feel good about themselves and also inspired them to implement a few lessons into their own lives. Particularly inspiring to participants was the LM commercial which emphasized ideas of community and compassion. As reported in the psychology literature, ideas of compassion and self-compassion have shown a tendency to strengthen the self in many positive ways, such as improving thoughts of safeness and feeling good about oneself, without the need of comparison to others. Self-compassion was also linked to general well-being and pro-social behavior (Neff 2003). The current results demonstrate how ideas such as self-compassion could be taught in a mass media format, and not just in a psychological/private setting. Therefore, these findings can direct advertising practitioners and mass media scholars to think about different ways to create advertising messages-- messages that strengthen the individual self, instead of distracting it, as so many advertising critics commented in the past (e.g. Pollay 1986; Potter 1954).

Product Category

The issue of product category was found pivotal in the context of spiritual advertising. Many of the participants agreed that in order for a spiritual message to be accepted by consumers, it needs to correspond with certain product attributes or certain product categories. A few guidelines that create the optimal environment for the spiritual message to be accepted by consumers emerged from the data. First, the magnitude of the spiritual message should correspond with the magnitude of the product. Since the spiritual message symbolizes a deep and significant quality, it is also expected from the product and its characteristics to reflect that. Participants anticipated the product to be meaningful and represent a major life aspect, such as education, finance, personal change, traveling or family. Second, participants name a few examples for product attributes that would go well with a spiritual message, and they follow: products that center on helping others, profound products, products that are health related, products that would connect you to the outside world and products that are inherently linked to spiritual practices. Subjects also provided some specific examples for such products, including magazines/newspapers, travel agencies, non-profit organizations, meditation centers, churches and yoga cloths.

In relation to the current study, some participants viewed the connection between LM and the spiritual message as plausible, since the idea of an insurance company that inherently helps other people resonates with a spiritual message. Conversely, many participants thought that the relationship between the LV bag and the spiritual message is weak for mainly two reasons: a) the product is inherently tangible and doesn't represent a

significant life aspect of the human life, and b) the brand image of the LV brand, which represents luxury and materialism, clashes with the spiritual message which is simple and straightforward. To conclude, it seems that participants find only certain types of product categories appropriate for the use of spiritual messages in advertising. They prefer products that are more profound, portray an intangible or spiritual dimension or represent a personal and meaningful feature in the consumer's life. These findings add further knowledge to the exploration of product categories' typologies in the field of consumer behavior (e.g. Assael 1974; Viswanathan and Childers 1999).

Future Research Direction Related to Advertising and Branding Issues in the Context of Spirituality

A few advertising and branding concepts were raised by participants and should be further explored in the future. First, it was found that the New Age group expressed more Predispositional Skepticism towards advertising than the other two groups of the study. It would be interesting to follow this type of skepticism over time: does it grow? Under which conditions? Moreover, it seems that the spiritual message backlashed (mainly in the context of the LV brand) and was mostly perceived by the New Age group as a clever marketing technique. Would that perspective remain, in case the spiritual message was used in the context of a different product category?

Second, the concept of authenticity emerged as a critical factor in the current study. It appears that participants expect even more authenticity from companies who

advertise with a spiritual dimension. Future research should focus, both in academia and practice, on developing this important construct and its relation to the spiritual message.

Third, findings point at various influences of the spiritual message. On the cognitive level, participants mention educational, reinforcement and conversion effects of the spiritual message. Efforts on the practical level should be made to create a message which encourages a pro-social behavior through advertising. On the emotional level a few findings were notable; further investigation should be focused on the relationship between the calming effects of the spiritual message and some executional elements. A few of the possible research directions could be: what is the role of music in spiritual advertising effectiveness? What are some of the creative strategies that would create an effective spiritual message? Moreover, it appears that three major positive emotions were elicited by the spiritual message: hope, national pride and optimism. Further exploration should find out whether these emotions remain prominent with other spiritual commercials; if so, the connection between these emotions and the concept of spirituality should be clarified. At the same time, participants report a boomerang effect, following the exposure to the spiritual message. It would be interesting to examine what is the critical point, in other words, how far can one take the spiritual message before it backlashes and considered “too positive”? On the behavioral level it was found that the spiritual message is a strong motivational and behavioral force. More specifically, it encourages pro-social behavior and personal growth. This knowledge could be used both on the social level for the betterment of society, and on the marketing level for the encouragement of purchasing behavior.

Fourth, the current study offers important insights about the relationship between self, identity and branding. Findings point at various consumer segments in relation to brand identity (New Age group vs. the group who welcomed the brand identity). Additional information should be obtained about these two consumer segments and their characteristics. Moreover, participants report that some of the commercials' contents encourage a positive sense of self. Accordingly, educational and social benefits could be achieved.

Finally, a few lessons were learned in the area of product category. It was found that products accompanied by a spiritual message are expected to be more profound, portray an intangible/spiritual dimension or represent a personal and meaningful feature in the consumer's life. To achieve validity for these results, further support should be sought in additional studies which will include different types of brands and categories.

After the discussion of the theoretical contributions of the study, the final chapter 8 leads to the managerial implications and conclusions of the current exploration.

Chapter 8: Managerial Implications and Conclusions

The purpose of the current study was to further advance the emerging field of spirituality and advertising, both in theory and practice. The implications for practice are presented in this chapter in order to inform the relevant industries about recent discoveries that would improve their activities and focus, as well as to direct and recommend future research in program and strategy development. Implications will be presented in three main areas that are directly connected to the emerging phenomenon of advertising with a spiritual dimension. First, implications for advertising practitioners, including some recommendations about the spiritual message will be presented. Next, implications for executives and brand managers are discussed, and finally a few lessons at the social and educational levels are raised. After discussing the managerial implications, the chapter will close with a brief summary and conclusion section.

ADVERTISING PRACTITIONERS AND THE SPIRITUAL MESSAGE

This study shows that advertising practitioners were pretty successful in tapping into some universal spiritual concepts in the commercials; however, the presentations of these concepts were not complete. When a strategy is obtained to create a spiritual message in advertising, it is recommended to explore and study the spiritual concepts well. As the present exploration demonstrates, advertisers need to internalize that the topic of spirituality is very personal and delicate to many of the consumers. So far, participants expressed discontent with the presentation of some of the spiritual concepts.

For example, the concept of the journey was presented in a rather idealistic/smooth way, instead of a more realistic one. This study demonstrated that a lacking/superficial approach is resulted in a rejection of the spiritual message. In order to avoid such consequences, practitioners should prepare well and with great sensitivity, while seeking the advice of a professional who specializes in spirituality.

Another recommendation, which emerged from the data, focuses on a specific attribute of the spiritual message. It suggests that whenever spirituality is used in commercials, it should be kept universal and relates to all types of spiritual practices and believes. Support for this claim comes from various participants' reports, for example: "I think if there is any spirituality in advertising it will be along those lines (the LV commercial), whereas it's something that can relate to everybody, lot's of tolerance." (13, p.4) Participant # 19 continues about the LM commercial: "I think that they probably tried to make it more universal so that all religions could relate to it," (19, p.5) and participant # 14 concludes: "I think it's better to just keep it, if it's going to be like spiritual thing, its better just to keep it more like neutral... as long as it is non-denominational." (14, p.4) Relying on the above information, advertisers should continue with the universal approach to spirituality as a strategy of reaching out to various consumers.

This study names a few spiritual themes that appeared in the commercials and mostly resonated with participants, including nature, hope, optimism, sharing and direct experience. Overall, participants attested that the emphasis in the commercials on the human factor and inspiring ideas triggered the most responses from them. These

characteristics should set the directions for advertisers when creating new spiritual commercials. Further investigation of the above concepts while seeking for new ones is recommended.

Additional recommendation focuses on the scope of the spiritual message. Participants warn advertisers not to overuse spirituality in advertising. Here are some of their responses: “There is need to be a balance whereas it becomes too much, to the point where every single message is about that and then it becomes too much...” (19, p.5) Participant # 3 continues: “I like the way it is, that every now and then, one [spiritual commercial] gets sprinkled in because it makes it that more effective...something like with a deeper message, like the hope thing or something like the LV one,” (3, p.5) and finally participant # 19 summarizes: “ I feel like if you over emphasize that it may just be a propaganda technique that loses it’s meaning because it is just trying to get consumers to invest in their product or company, but I think that BOA and LM did a very good job not overstepping boundaries when it became too much of the message they were trying to get.” (19, p.5) Accordingly, advertisers should use spirituality with moderation, only when the context allows and conditions are right.

Special attention should be addressed to the executional elements in the spiritual message. Advertising practitioners should further investigate the role each element has on the creation of an ideal spiritual message. It was found in the present study that executional elements, such as music and camera techniques, contributed extensively to the creation of a spiritual atmosphere in the commercial. This should signal an interesting research direction for both academics and practitioners in the field.

MANAGERIAL AND BRANDING IMPLICATIONS

This study clearly demonstrated how the phenomenon of spirituality in advertising exists; therefore, implications for brand managers and companies' executives are enormous. Overall and based on the study's results, it is advised for executives, who have chosen to take the spirituality in advertising route, to approach it with a great deal of attention and deliberation. Once companies have marched that path, consumers, as shown in the current study, will expect higher standards and bigger responsibility from the company and its products. Subsequently, although findings show signs of potential effectiveness when using advertising with a spiritual dimension, it comes with a great deal of responsibility and willingness to change the company's philosophy and operation.

First, executives and brand managers should be aware of the potential of the spiritual message to garner attention. Several participants mentioned it is a clever marketing technique, which facilitates the efforts of creating brand memory and recognition. The following two examples highlight how the spiritual message breaks through the clutter: "I do think that in the commercial that had that spiritual aspect to it was like the most interesting commercial because it was a deeper commercial than just like the surface level." (14, p.4) Participant # 20 who takes a personal interest in spirituality stated the following: "if I have to see commercials, I enjoy when they make you think, you know spiritually...when I think something is more spiritual, it's more meaningful to me, and I enjoy something that has that affect on me, whether it's a commercial or anything, also a movie or a person, as opposed to just little things that don't really mean a lot, or I don't care about, or I don't think about again." (20, p.5)

Moreover, potential signs of advertising effectiveness were also found in the current study; participants elaborated on cognitive, emotional and behavioral responses to the spiritual commercials. To conclude, no matter what the reasons are, the spiritual message was able to reach consumers and even motivate them towards pro-social behavior; brand managers should be able to pick up from here and direct their efforts to further investigate the effectiveness of the spiritual message in advertising.

Although signs of advertising effectiveness were found, the bigger picture presents a more complex situation that should be known to managers. It was established that several conditions ought to occur in order for the spiritual message to be accepted by consumers. According to the study, what seems to be the core matter for consumers is that they are relentlessly seeking authenticity in the context of branding and advertising. They are looking for authenticity in every step of the branding process, especially when it involves a spiritual message. Reports show that participants were curious to see how the entire branding operation, including the advertising message, brand image, consumer profile, the company and its actions, align together to an authentic essence. Consumers today demand from executives to actually stand behind the spiritual messages they advertise; investing in a beautiful and creative commercial is not enough, consumers require responsible actions to support that. Consequently, this requires a deep and overall transformation from within the company that advertises with a spiritual dimension. It is recommended that brand managers and executives sit together and develop a spiritual strategy for the company, starting with the mission statement, going through the company's atmosphere, employees, and ending with pro-social/spiritual behavior. An

existing platform in marketing which is close in nature to the concept of spirituality is cause-related marketing. This platform could be used in the future as a practical leverage to the idea of spirituality in advertising. The format of marketing with a social dimension is already known in the branding industry and could be supplemented with spiritual advertising. This could be a transient solution to incorporate spirituality in an authentic branding environment, whereas managers have already gained some practical experience.

Another lesson that should be kept in the minds of executives and brand managers is related to the product. Participants explained how only specific product categories and product attributes fit with a spiritual message. Managers should follow the guidelines suggested in the previous chapter and incorporate them in their strategy. It is important not to be tempted and implement a spiritual strategy when the product itself doesn't reflect a spiritual essence. In case of a debate, it is recommended to employ the method of focus groups which will provide an answer for whether or not a spiritual campaign fits with a certain product. Moreover, since it was found that a certain group of people personally connected with the spiritual brand identity, it is advised that brand managers should be careful when designing a spiritual brand personality, as it touches the core of these consumers. Perhaps seeking the advice of professionals who specialize in issues of self and identity is recommended.

A few insights about segmentation emerged from the data and should be considered by managers. It was found that members of the new age group tended to be more skeptical towards advertising and branding efforts, and thus viewed the spiritual message as a dangerous marketing tool. Many members of the New Age group have

inherently objected to the general idea of mixing spirituality and materialism. Participant # 22 provided a typical response:

I also think it is a smart marketing tool because it is appealing to like a person's higher sense of self, it's more noble to have a LV purse now that it's about having a personal journey and like finding yourself with this product, but I think it's wrong, I mean I think it can work, I think it does work because it takes people's minds of just being consumers and being like people instead. (22, p.5)

Conversely, several participants, especially from the Sports group, were less skeptical about advertising in general and welcomed the brand identity into their own personal identity. Moreover, an interesting finding showed how the universal spiritual concepts resonated across the groups; it was just the terminologies that they used which were different. Finally, on the social level, it seems that participants in general had less of a problem with spirituality in advertising, especially members from the religious group. The above findings could be used as first leads for managers to better understand whom to appeal to and on which conditions, in the context of spirituality and advertising. But more so than segmentation of audiences, findings demonstrate how the essence of the spiritual message actually unites segments of the populations, rather than separates them. This could be used wisely if conducted with the right branding efforts, adequate company's philosophy and the right product.

Finally, in order to further advance the topic of spirituality and advertising, the cooperation between academia and practice is essential. It was found in the study that the spiritual message has elicited thoughts, emotions and behavior among the consumers. As new developments in neuroscience suggest there is a spiritual route in the brain that is yet to be advanced and explored (Zohar and Marshall 2001). The employment of advertising

research and methods (e.g. experiments) can contribute greatly to the advancement of this study field. To that end, mutual efforts between advertising scholars and brand managers are required.

SOCIAL AND EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

This study demonstrated how advertising could turn into a positive force in our society; it was found that the spiritual message encourages pro-social behavior, strengthens and constructs a healthy sense of self and offers some educational benefits to consumers. With the spiritual message, an opportunity has opened up to correct past damages of the advertising industry. Participants described ample opportunities whereas positive effects can occur. For example, the spiritual message enables reflection in the midst of our hectic busy life, as described by participant # 20: “I think especially in this society [American society], but society in general, people, they just continuously get busier and busy and it seems like they don’t have really time to pose and reflect and think about these deeper, bigger issues in their lives, so if a commercial is a way to get people to do that, then great.” (20, p.5) Moreover, participant # 27 concludes how the appearance of the spiritual message in commercials can change the role of advertising from downfall to redemption:

I think it would be good. I think it would be healthy. I think a lot of advertising now is sex and flesh and if they were more deeper spiritual themes to it, I think it might even create a message towards people. There is any reason we can’t move society towards a better place where people are happier with each other and things like that. I think it starts in advertising, where, I mean I don’t want to make any assumptions, but advertising has been, throughout the past century, almost part of the downfall of the American culture into a consumerist, sex and money culture. I think it would be good, advertising has a lot of bearing on people, and people

might be able to connect to it on a deeper level...I think spirituality and advertising will be a very positive thing. (27, p4-5)

On the practical level and to benefit society, it is possible to establish a national committee that would consist of scholars from various disciplines (including: communication, education, advertising and psychology) and advertising professionals. The committee will explore ways to incorporate positive and spiritual contents into the practice of advertising. Findings of the current study could be used as initial guidelines for the committee's research agenda. Next, the committee's recommendations should be communicated to executives who wish to utilize a spiritual strategy in their branding and advertising efforts in a responsible way. Executives and brand managers should be motivated to encourage the operation of such a committee, since it would increase the authenticity of these companies in the eyes of consumers. Moreover, current directions in our society illustrate how consumers care about the environment, social and global issues (e.g. Couchman 2005); these trends should only strengthen the tendency of brand managers and executives to embrace an adequate spiritual strategy and philosophy in their own companies.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The interaction with the spiritual commercial was unique for many of the participants in the study. The spiritual message was welcomed with a great surprise in the context of advertising, while creating attention and igniting a prolific discussion.

Three research questions were used as guidelines in the current study, and thus presented three main areas of findings, including: the presence of spiritual themes in the

commercials, the personal meaning participants derive from the commercials and some relevant advertising/branding issues. Entering the study, it was unclear whether participants will be able to identify the spiritual themes in the commercials. However, based on the previously developed SAF theoretical framework, it was found that participants, across the three groups, not only captured the spiritual themes, but also offered some new themes that should be implemented in future studies.

The second set of findings showed how different people derived various meanings from spiritually-dense commercials. Notwithstanding, commonalities shared by most of the participants emerged from the data. It was found that nature, a strong human factor and inspiring ideas were the most meaningful components in the spiritually-dense commercials.

The final set of findings, which focused on advertising and branding issues, revealed the following points. First, authenticity is a major construct for consumers in the field of spiritual advertising. Second, more so than the other groups, the New Age group tends towards predispositional skepticism of advertising. Third, the spiritual message created a boomerang effect under certain conditions: 1) when the spiritual message clashed with the brand or product category, 2) when the spiritual message was perceived to be too idealistic or unreal, 3) when consumers had a strong skepticism towards advertising in general and spiritual advertising in particular, and 4) when the company's intentions were perceived as unauthentic; that is, when no actions were made to back up the spiritual message. Fourth, signs of advertising effectiveness were detected on three levels: cognitive, emotional and behavioral. On the cognitive level, educational,

reinforcement and conversion effects were found, as a result of advertising exposure; on the emotional level, it seems that the spiritual ads elicited mainly three positive emotions (hope, national pride and optimism) and some negative emotions towards what participants named a clever marketing technique; and finally, on the behavioral level, the spiritual message appeared to be a strong motivational force which encourages pro-social behavior and personal growth. Purchase behaviors should be further examined over time. Fifth, the spiritual message triggered questions about brand identity and personal identity of the consumers. It was found that members of the New Age group didn't want to be associated with a spiritual brand identify, while a few others had no issue with that. This topic should be further investigated in the future. Finally, it was concluded that only certain product categories mesh with a spiritual message; products are expected to be more profound, portray an intangible/spiritual dimension or represent a meaningful feature in the consumer's life.

This study is a first attempt in conceptualizing the emerging field of spirituality in advertising. As findings indicate it offers broad implications in both practice and academia. It also advances the theory of spirituality and advertising, as demonstrated in the evolvement of the SAF framework. Moreover, results help to set forward a research agenda in the field, including the investigation of key constructs such as authenticity and the human factor. The use of a qualitative method enabled the revelation of some important themes that could be implemented in the practice of spiritual advertising. Most importantly and as demonstrated throughout the dissertation, findings imply that the use of spiritual advertizing could change the direction of the field. If in the past, advertising

was considered a damaging force in our society, now, with the help of the spiritual message, advertising could turn into a constructive force in our culture.

Some negative aspects should also be considered when discussing spiritual advertising. The topic of spirituality is very delicate and personal to many of the consumers. Accordingly, if implemented in advertising in a wrong way, it is doomed to fail. Executives and brand managers should approach the implementation of the spiritual strategy with a great deal of attention and responsibility. Otherwise, as shown in chapter 6, the spiritual message would backlash and be perceived as a clever marketing technique. Since matters of spirituality are very sensitive, an extra emphasis should be put on the creation of the spiritual message. Sectarian and offensive approaches should be avoided and a very inclusive message should be implemented instead. Finally, some participants claimed that spirituality and advertising cannot and should not be mixed together, no matter what the circumstances are. These findings bring forward an ethical debate that should be further addressed in future endeavors.

Some limitations were found in the current study. Since a qualitative method was utilized, generalizations abilities are very limited in this exploration. For example, a sample of 29 students isn't enough to draw general conclusions about the various populations. Furthermore, the limited amount of ads which were examined could also affect the results of the current study. Perhaps other contents, with additional product categories, would have yielded slightly different results. Moreover, the extension of the study population to other consumer groups, besides students, could have also benefited the study's results.

However, the benefits of a qualitative research are greater than its short fallings in this context. Since no previous explorations were made in the area of spiritual advertising, the qualitative method enabled to bring forward some great revelations and implications to the field. Both academics and practitioners cannot ignore the field of spiritual advertising anymore. It was found that implications are enormous to many fields of study, including communications, advertising, marketing, education and psychology. As mentioned earlier, the spiritual message in advertising could possibly change the direction of advertising practice. Findings demonstrate how the essence of the spiritual message can actually unite segments of the populations, rather than separating them. This could be used wisely if conducted with the right branding efforts, adequate company's philosophy and the right product.

Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Thank you for your willingness to be here today to participate in this interview. We are here to learn about **individuals' interpretations of television ads that you will be watching directly from the YouTube website**. Please remember that you may decline to respond to any questions at any time. Of course, your answers will be confidential and the entire interview session (including a written questionnaire) takes about an hour.

We will begin with a few general questions.

1. So I understand you are a member of the _____ student organization; could you tell me a little bit about how did you join this student organization?
 - a. Please walk me through the events that brought you to this organization.
2. Being a student and a member of a student organization, how much time do you spend watching television?
 - a. Please walk me through the television shows or programs you have watched in the past week.
 - b. While watching television, do you watch television ads at all?

Thank you. Now, we will continue by **watching a set of three television ads, at your own pace and discretion, directly from the YouTube website**. After each commercial, I will pause and ask you a set of question.

Now, I would like you to choose the order in which you prefer to discuss the following three televised ads.

(The researcher will show participants three cards, each corresponding to one ad. The brand name and the time-span of each commercial will be written on each corresponding card. The order in which the cards will be selected by the participants, will determine the order of the discussion. It is also important to note, that overall, each participant will be shown a sample of 3 ads, comprised of: 1) two Bank of America ads, and 2) a third ad alternating between a Louis Vuitton ad and a Liberty Mutual ad. About half of the participants will be shown the Louis Vuitton ad as their third ad option, and the other half will be shown the Liberty Mutual ad as their third ad option):

- 1) Bank of America ad (30 seconds long)
- 2) Bank of America ad (60 seconds long)
- 3) Louis Vuitton ad (90 seconds long)/ or Liberty Mutual ad (60 seconds long)

[Ads will be shown in the order selected by participant, in sequence.]

Watching ad number 1 on YouTube

1. How familiar are you with this ad?
2. How much did you enjoy watching the ad?
3. What would you say are some of the themes portrayed in the ad?
 - a. What does this ad mean to you?
 - b. What do you take away from this ad?
 - c. Suppose you had a friend who had never seen this ad before. How would you explain this ad to them?
4. Do you find this ad, in any way, relevant to your own experiences or personal life? If so, how? If not, why not?
 - a. How much the ideas portrayed in the ad speak to you?
 - b. Do you feel this ad could have any influence on your own personal life?
 - c. How much do you identify with the messages portrayed in the ad?
5. After watching the commercial, how would you describe the brand?
 - a. What does this ad message tell you about the brand?
 - b. Does the ad make a fair portrayal of the brand?

Watching ad number 2 on YouTube

Using the same set of questions as above

Watching ad number 3 on YouTube

Using the same set of questions as above

Appendix B: Questionnaire

Rating Statements:

Here are some statements that will help us learn more about how people like you respond to ads. Circle one number which indicates how much you agree or disagree with each statement. As you can see, 1 is agree strongly, 2 is agree somewhat, 3 is disagree somewhat and 4 disagree strongly.

1. Through my own personal experience, I make my own way in life.
1 2 3 4
Agree Strongly.....Agree Somewhat.....Disagree SomewhatDisagree Strongly
2. Even in the worst situations, I attempt to see the bigger meaning.
1 2 3 4
Agree Strongly.....Agree Somewhat.....Disagree SomewhatDisagree Strongly
3. I consciously try to break my habits and leave my comfort zone.
1 2 3 4
Agree Strongly.....Agree Somewhat.....Disagree SomewhatDisagree Strongly
4. I tend to react immediately, without thinking, to difficult/challenged situations I encounter.
1 2 3 4
Agree Strongly.....Agree Somewhat.....Disagree SomewhatDisagree Strongly
5. I often tend to think about the meaning of life.
1 2 3 4
Agree Strongly.....Agree Somewhat.....Disagree SomewhatDisagree Strongly
6. I believe all human beings are connected in the great scheme of things.
1 2 3 4
Agree Strongly.....Agree Somewhat.....Disagree SomewhatDisagree Strongly
7. I make an everyday effort to relate and connect to the people surrounding me.
1 2 3 4
Agree Strongly.....Agree Somewhat.....Disagree SomewhatDisagree Strongly

8. I believe life is more like a spiraling journey than a linear journey.
- | | | | |
|---------------------|---------------------|-------------------------|-------------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| Agree Strongly..... | Agree Somewhat..... | Disagree Somewhat | Disagree Strongly |
9. I pray regularly.
- | | | | |
|---------------------|---------------------|-------------------------|-------------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| Agree Strongly..... | Agree Somewhat..... | Disagree Somewhat | Disagree Strongly |
10. I strive to fulfill my highest potential.
- | | | | |
|---------------------|---------------------|-------------------------|-------------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| Agree Strongly..... | Agree Somewhat..... | Disagree Somewhat | Disagree Strongly |
11. I believe dreams can turn into a reality.
- | | | | |
|---------------------|---------------------|-------------------------|-------------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| Agree Strongly..... | Agree Somewhat..... | Disagree Somewhat | Disagree Strongly |
12. Often when I am having fun, I tend to forget myself completely in the moment.
- | | | | |
|---------------------|---------------------|-------------------------|-------------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| Agree Strongly..... | Agree Somewhat..... | Disagree Somewhat | Disagree Strongly |
13. When I face difficulties in my life, I usually ask myself: what is the lesson that I should learn from this situation.
- | | | | |
|---------------------|---------------------|-------------------------|-------------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| Agree Strongly..... | Agree Somewhat..... | Disagree Somewhat | Disagree Strongly |
14. I often feel deep gratitude for what I have in my life.
- | | | | |
|---------------------|---------------------|-------------------------|-------------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| Agree Strongly..... | Agree Somewhat..... | Disagree Somewhat | Disagree Strongly |
15. Even when I make mistakes, I try to be compassionate toward myself.
- | | | | |
|---------------------|---------------------|-------------------------|-------------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| Agree Strongly..... | Agree Somewhat..... | Disagree Somewhat | Disagree Strongly |
16. I make a regular attempt to learn and to feel who I really am.
- | | | | |
|---------------------|---------------------|-------------------------|-------------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| Agree Strongly..... | Agree Somewhat..... | Disagree Somewhat | Disagree Strongly |

17. I meditate regularly.

1 2 3 4
Agree Strongly.....Agree Somewhat.....Disagree SomewhatDisagree Strongly

Demographic questions:

1) Sex: Male_____ Female_____

2) What is your age? _____

3) What is your racial/ethnic identification?

1. African American
2. Native American
3. Anglo American (Caucasian /white)
4. Asian American
5. Hispanic American
6. Multiracial
7. International
8. Other

4) What is your current marital status?

1. Single, never married
2. Married
3. Divorced
4. Widowed
5. In a committed relationship
6. Other (Please specify): _____

5) If you are involved in other organizations, inside or outside campus, please list them below:

6) What are your main hobbies?

7) Please identify your degree and major (for example, B.S., Communications):

Appendix C: Debriefing

Finally, I would like to let you know more about the nature of this study. My topic of exploration is spirituality in advertising. Specifically, I am interested in learning about the interaction between individuals and spiritual themes in ads.

I will need a couple more moments of your time to close this interview session.

1. Would you briefly describe, what does spirituality mean to you?
2. Based on what you just told me about spirituality, how would you compare the three ads you just saw?

Thank you very much; I really appreciate your time and effort. Here is the \$10 gift card for your participation in this study. Lastly, please sign a receipt that says you have been given a \$10 gift card.

Snowballing comment: do you know of any of your peers, within the student organization, who would be willing to participate in this study? Here is my e-mail and contact info, in case your friends would like to contact me and participate in this study (the researcher's contact info will be given to the participant on a printed sheet of paper).

Appendix D: Recruitment Face to Face Conversation with Contact Person

Hello,

I am Galit Marmor-Lavie, a PhD student at UT Austin. I am in the final stages of my doctoral program and am writing my dissertation on how **individuals interpret television ads messages**.

To fulfill the requirements of my dissertation, I will need to talk to several students from various student organizations. I thought that interviewing students from your organization will provide me with a deeper understanding of the topic I am investigating.

I hope you can help me recruit some of the students in your organization. I would welcome the opportunity to speak to any student who is a member of this organization.

The entire interview session will take no longer than one hour, and participants will be offered with a gift card of a \$10 value.

Would you please connect me with some of your students that would be interested to participate in my study? Or would you recommend some ways for me to recruit students from your organization? (E.g. posting a recruiting message on billboards or inviting students to participate after organization gatherings)

Appendix E: Recruiting Ad

**Students from [insert organization name here] are
needed for research participation!**

My name is Galit and I am a doctoral student at UT,
conducting dissertation research on the topic of:

Interpreting Television Ad Messages.

Students from [insert organization name here] are needed
for interviews to help me complete my dissertation study.

Participants will be granted a \$10 gift card for an interview
session that should take no longer than one hour.

Your insights are important!! Please contact me at: [**e-mail
address here**].

Galit: e-mail.	Galit: e-mail.	Galit: e-mail.	Galit: e-mail.	Galit: e-mail.	Galit: e-mail.	Galit: e-mail.
-------------------	-------------------	-------------------	-------------------	-------------------	-------------------	-------------------

Appendix F: Gift Card Receipt

I, the undersigned, declare that I have been given a \$10 gift card, as a compensation for my participation in the "**Interpreting Television Advertising Messages**" study.

Printed Name of Subject

Date

Signature of Subject

Date

Appendix G: Consent Form

Informed Consent to Participate in Research at UT Austin

You are being asked to participate in a research study. This form provides you with information about the study. Please read the information below and ask questions about anything you don't understand before deciding whether or not to take part. Your participation is entirely voluntary and you can refuse to participate without penalty.

Title of Research Study: Interpreting Television Advertising Messages

Principal Investigator: Galit Marmor-Lavie
Ph. D. Candidate
Department of Advertising
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(512) 983-0578
Galit_ml@mail.utexas.edu

Faculty Supervisor: Patricia A. Stout, Ph.D.
Professor
Department of Advertising
CMA 7.142, A1200
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What is the purpose of this study?

The purpose of the study is to learn about individuals' responses and interpretations of television advertising messages. Also, to understand the meanings individuals derive from these ads.

What will be done if you take part in this research study?

If you agree to participate in this study you will first sit down for an individual, face-to-face interview, then you will be asked to fill out a short questionnaire, and finally, to briefly discuss some final comments, following a short debriefing of the study. The first phase of the interview will begin with some general questions about your student's life, but mostly will focus on your **interpretation of three television ads, after you will watch them directly, at your own pace and discretion, from the YouTube website**. In the second phase of the interview, you will be asked to fill out a paper and pencil questionnaire which requires you to: 1) rank 17 belief statements, and 2) answer 7 demographic questions. In phase three, a short debriefing of the study will take place, followed by some concluding questions.

The entire interview session (including the written part) should take no longer than about an hour; the first part of the interview, the ads' interpretation, will take no longer than 40 minutes; the second part of the interview, the written questionnaire, will take no longer than 10 minutes; and the final part of the interview, the debriefing and concluding remarks, should take no longer than 7-8 minutes.

What are the possible discomforts and risks?

The possible discomforts of participating in this study are minimal. However, if you experience any discomfort during the study, you are free to refuse to answer questions or completely withdrawal from the study at any time without penalty.

The interview will take place one-on-one with an interviewer (Principal-Investigator, Galit Marmor-Lavie) who will take written notes on the discussion. The interview will be audio recorded, too. You will be informed of this before the interview starts. The audio recorder will be in your full view at all times. Again, you may choose not to respond to questions or to terminate the interview at any time.

At a later point in time, the audio recordings will be typed up into interview transcripts for future analysis. However, no identifying information will be on the transcripts; only the research participant number that has been randomly assigned to you. The written transcripts and audio recordings of the interviews will be retained for possible future analysis.

What are the possible benefits to you?

Although there is no direct benefit, you may gain a general level of satisfaction knowing you have contributed to the advancement of academic knowledge.

If you choose to take part in the study, will it cost you anything?

It will cost you nothing to participate in this study.

Will you receive compensation for your participation in this study?

You will receive a \$10 gift card for a local retail as a compensation for your participation.

What if you are injured because of the study?

The physical risk in this study is no greater than daily life. However, eligible University students may be treated at the usual level of care with the usual cost for services at the Student Health Center, but no payment can be provided in the event of a medical problem.

How can you withdraw from this research study and who should you call if you have questions?

If at any time you wish to stop your participation in this research study, you should tell the interviewer (Principal-Investigator, Galit Marmor-Lavie). You are free to withdraw your consent and stop participation in this research study at any time without penalty.

In addition, if you have questions about your rights as a research participant, or if you have complaints, concerns, or questions about the research, please contact Jody Jensen, Ph.D., Chair, The University of Texas at Austin Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, (512) 232-2685. You may also contact the Office of Research Support at (512) 471-8871.

How will your privacy and the confidentiality of your research records be protected?

In order to ensure that responses are not linked to individual participants, your responses will be identified only by a randomly assigned numerical code. Signed consent forms that identify you as a participant in this study will be kept in a locked file cabinet accessible only to the Principal -Investigator and Faculty Supervisor. Also, the brief field notes of the researcher, gift card receipt, journal of the researcher and the filled out paper and pencil questionnaire will all be kept in a locked file cabinet.

If the results of this research are published or presented at scientific meetings, your identity will not be disclosed.

Will the researchers benefit from your participation in this study?

The researchers will not benefit from your participation except for presenting and publishing the findings.

Signatures: You have been informed about this study's purpose, procedures, possible benefits and risks, and you have received a copy of this form. You have been given the opportunity to ask questions before you sign, and you have been told that you can ask other questions at any time. You voluntarily agree to participate in this study. By signing this form, you are not waiving any of your legal rights.

Printed Name of Subject	Date
--------------------------------	-------------

Signature of Subject	Date
-----------------------------	-------------

Signature of Principal Investigator	Date
--	-------------

FOR RESEARCHER USE ONLY

Participant ID #: _____ Date _____ Initials _____

Appendix H: Contact Summary Sheet

Contact Summary Sheet

Group affiliation:

Participant ID #:

Organization affiliation:

Contact date:

Today's date:

1. Affiliation with the organization and some media consumption facts:

Reasons for joining the organization:

TV consumption:

Advertising consumption:

Responses to Ad number 1:

2. Information summary of the target questions.

Ad Interpretation	<u>Themes:</u> <u>Why did you like/dislike the commercial?</u>
Personal meaning from the ad	<u>Relevancy of the commercial to participant:</u> <u>Does the commercial have any influence on you?</u>
Brand perception	<u>Description of the brand after watching the commercial:</u> <u>Does the commercial make a fair portrayal of the brand?</u>

Responses to Ad number 2:

3. Information summary of the target questions.

Ad Interpretation	<u>Themes:</u> <u>Why did you like/dislike the commercial?</u>
Personal meaning from the ad	<u>Relevancy of the commercial to participant:</u> <u>Does the commercial have any influence on you?</u>
Brand perception	<u>Description of the brand after watching the commercial:</u>

	<u>Does the commercial make a fair portrayal of the brand?</u>
--	--

Responses to Ad number 3:

4. Information summary of the target questions.

Ad Interpretation	<u>Themes:</u> <u>Why did you like the commercial?</u>
Personal meaning from the ad	<u>Relevancy of the commercial to participant:</u> <u>Does the commercial have any influence on you?</u>
Brand perception	<u>Description of the brand after watching the commercial:</u> <u>Does the commercial make a fair portrayal of the brand?</u>

5. The meaning of spirituality:

6. Comparison of the ads:

7. Ethical/social issues:

8. What were the main issues or themes that struck you in this contact? (notes of the researcher after transcribing)

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